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LIFE OF  
CHARLES HENRY DAVIS  
REAR ADMIRAL  
1807-1877

BY HIS SON  
CAPTAIN CHARLES H. DAVIS, U. S. N.



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY  
The Riverside Press, Cambridge  
1899



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# LIFE OF CHARLES HENRY DAVIS

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## CHAPTER I

### BIRTH AND ANTECEDENTS — MIDSHIPMAN — THE FRIGATE UNITED STATES

IF an excuse be needed for a life of Admiral Davis twenty years after his death, it may, perhaps, be found in the interest which now attaches, after the lapse of a generation of time, to the period of the civil war, and to even the most trivial circumstances connected with that momentous struggle. This interest will increase with the disappearance of the active participants in the war, so that the intimate biography of an officer who rose to immediate distinction, and who commanded in chief in the only general naval engagements fought during the whole four years of the war, cannot be considered, even now, as out of place, and may become in the future of real historical value. So much of this work as bears upon the period of the war is a mere transcription of the admiral's private letters written at the time, with such notes as are necessary to give an appearance of continuity to a desultory private correspondence written for family perusal and with no idea of its publication. No attempt has been made to enter into a historical review of even those operations of the

war in which the admiral was actively engaged. The letters may be regarded rather as a possible material for history than as history itself; but I believe that they will serve to throw some light on events, and are in themselves sufficiently interesting for publication.

Admiral Davis's claim to distinction does not rest on his achievements during the civil war alone. He came forward at the beginning of the war because he was already known. His reputation was enough to lift him at once from a position of official obscurity, and the work put upon him raised him to the highest rank as soon as the grade of admiral was created. The vote of thanks and the rear admiral's commission came within less than two years of the beginning of the war. He served throughout the whole four years in positions of the highest responsibility in the field of action and in the council, and it was not until the end of the war that he returned to the labors which were most congenial to him; but he was all his life a student and a man of science. It was his previous work on the Coast Survey, and his intimate acquaintance with the hydrography of the coast, which enabled him to buoy out the channel for Du Pont's victorious fleet at Port Royal. In the midst of his war's duties the influence which had been acquired by success in battle was directed toward the foundation of a national academy of sciences, and he died in harness at the head of one of the great scientific establishments of the government.

The family of Davis was settled in New England as early as 1630. The admiral's direct ancestor was a



freeman of Barnstable in 1638, and here the family remained for four generations, intermarrying with the English of New England, so that the admiral was of purely English and New England Puritan descent. The family probably came from Northamptonshire. The admiral's grandfather was a magistrate and leading citizen of Barnstable. He lived to be eighty-six years of age, highly respected in the community, and held the office of judge of common pleas, the first in Barnstable County. He married twice and left a numerous progeny by his first wife, but by the second wife, who was also his second cousin and a descendant of Captain John Davis of the Indian wars, he had only one son, Daniel, the admiral's father. Daniel Davis was a lawyer and eminent at the Massachusetts bar. He settled first at Portland, then Falmouth in the Province of Maine, moved to Boston in 1800, and was for thirty years solicitor-general of the State of Massachusetts. He built the house on Somerset Street now occupied by the New England Historic-Genealogical Society. He married Lois, daughter of Constant Freeman, whose brother, the Rev. James Freeman, was rector of King's Chapel and the first Unitarian minister in New England. James Freeman established the liturgy now in use, and when he proffered his resignation on account of his change of views, the congregation adopted the reformed ritual and retained him as its pastor. He was ordained by his own wardens and people by a peculiar service; the first Episcopal Church in New England became the first Unitarian Church in America, and James Freeman remained at its head for

forty-eight years. Another brother of Lois, Constant Freeman, served in the army through the war of the Revolution. He was lieutenant in Knox's Artillery in 1776, captain-lieutenant in Crane's Artillery in 1778, and was offered a captaincy in the United States Infantry in 1791, but declined. He was commissioned major of the First Regiment of Artillery and Engineers in 1795, lieutenant-colonel of the First Artillery in 1802, and was brevetted colonel in 1812. He was mustered out on the reduction of the army in 1815, and became accountant of the Navy Department and Fourth Auditor of the Treasury, which office he held until his death in 1824. He occupied the old house still standing on the S. E. corner of F and Twenty-first streets. He was childless, and his paternal affections were centred on his nephew.

Charles Henry Davis, the subject of this memoir, was born in the house on Somerset Street, Boston, January 16, 1807. He was the youngest of thirteen children, of whom the oldest, Louisa, married William Minot, of Boston, and her descendants still live in Boston and its suburbs. None of the others of this numerous family, except the youngest, are represented by descendants in the present generation. Charles Henry Davis was educated at the Boston Latin School, entered Harvard College in 1821, and remained through the Freshman and Sophomore years, and although he did not graduate, he took his degree in 1841, and his name stands in the triennial catalogue as a member of the class of 1825.

In the summer of 1823, mainly through the influ-

ence of his uncle Constant Freeman, and also perhaps through the help of Commodore Isaac Hull who was a friend of his father's, he was appointed a midshipman in the United States Navy, and gave up his college career to enter upon the active duties of the naval profession. There was no national naval school in those days. Midshipmen when first appointed received only an acting warrant but went immediately to sea, and their first cruise was considered as a period of probation. The warrant, when received, was dated back to the original acting appointment, and after a certain period of service midshipmen were entitled to an examination which fixed their status in the service and confirmed the claim to a lieutenant's commission. The midshipman's future in the service depended upon his own diligence and aptitude, for the final examination was a severe one, and there was no regular system of instruction on board ship. A young officer picked up his professional education as best he could in the active experience of service afloat. The whole scheme of naval education in those days was totally at variance with the plan pursued at present. The two systems do not admit of comparison. The old plan would not work now, because naval education is too complex and intricate for such extremely simple methods, but it worked then, and the very high standard attained by the representatives of the old navy is sufficient evidence of the thoroughness of the training. Midshipmen then were the sons of gentlemen, using that word not in any invidious sense, but as it was generally understood in the year 1823, and the rudiments of a primary education were not

necessary after their entrance into the service. They had that already. They began at once to learn their profession, and they began to learn it at once in the school in which, even at this day, it can only be learned successfully, — active service afloat. The school was an extremely rough and severe one, in which the weakest went to the wall, and only the fittest survived, but it had one great advantage over the modern method, in inculcating from the very beginning the habit of self-reliance under responsibility. As will be seen later, Davis, at the age of eighteen, and when only two years in the service, was performing responsible duties on board of a ship on detached and hazardous service in an ocean hardly known to navigators, and very inadequately charted; so that the lives and safety of the whole crew and of the ship were committed to his charge during his watches on deck. Such an experience, which reads like a romance now, was of incalculable value in forming his official character, and it is not too much to say that the effects of this early training in responsibility were visible throughout his career, which was marked, in common with that of many of his contemporaries, by a trait which is almost non-existent in the modern service, and which was a logical result of his education. The masters in this school were the men who had brought our infant navy with high credit through a war with the greatest naval power on earth, and if the school was a rough one, and the requirements for advancement were few, as judged by the modern standard, the quality of result is beyond question. The civil war showed what stuff was in the

old navy. With that careless disregard for the past and ignorance of anything that has occurred earlier than day before yesterday which is a characteristic of an ephemeral literature, it has been customary for recent writers to allude to the naval commanders of the civil war as graduates of the Naval Academy. The Naval Academy was founded in 1845, and not one of the officers who reached distinction in the civil war ever saw its walls, or received any other training than that which his own zeal and diligence had supplied. Those of their contemporaries, many in number, who failed in the race and fell by the way have been long since forgotten.

Davis left his home in Boston in October, 1823, to join the frigate *United States* at Norfolk, fitting for the broad pennant of Commodore Isaac Hull, appointed to command the Pacific squadron. He performed the journey by water, and for a month after his arrival at the Norfolk yard was quartered on board the *Guerrière*, stationary receiving ship, as the *United States* was under the sheers. She was commissioned on the 19th of November, and the following day dropped down to the anchorage at Town Point, and in another week was towed into Hampton Roads, where the final work of completing the outfit was performed, and on January 5, 1824, she weighed and stood out to sea, bound round Cape Horn.

On the passage out, the *United States* touched at Rio de Janeiro, remaining only a few days, and reached Valparaiso on March 27th. This was a good passage, and, in fact, the *United States* was a good sailer, as

she afterwards proved during the cruise, and especially on her passage home in 1827.<sup>1</sup> She was one of the first ships in the navy fitted with chain cables, of which older seamen were still distrustful. It is noted that the ship was moored at Rio de Janeiro, and again at Valparaiso, with a chain cable to one anchor and a hemp cable to the other.

By the time Commodore Hull reached Valparaiso, the Chilian independence was acknowledged, and hostilities in that country had ceased; but the war was still in progress in Peru, Callao being held by the Spaniards and loosely blockaded by a Peruvian fleet. The *United States*, therefore, proceeded at once to Peru, and at Callao fell in with the *Franklin*, 74, Commodore Charles Stewart, who was relieved by Commodore Hull, and sailed for home. The vessels composing the squadron were, besides the flagship, the *Vincennes* and *Peacock*, sloops, the *Dolphin*, schooner, and several chartered vessels. Service on board the flagship was uninteresting for the most part, the squadron being confined to Callao and Chorillos during the progress of the war, and being forced to maintain a strict neutrality in relation to the belligerents, while hostilities dragged on with no great event or stirring incident to relieve the monotony of life on board ship.

Among the officers of the *United States* besides the commodore, who was perhaps the most distinguished

<sup>1</sup> Prior to the war of 1812, the *United States*, which was one of the frigates of 1797, had been called "the old wagon," on account of her dullness as a sailer. Her qualities were greatly improved by change of trim.

of the frigate captains of 1812, were several whose names deserve mention on account of their subsequent career in the service, and their long friendship with the subject of this memoir. The first lieutenant was John Percival, who had distinguished himself in the war with England by great personal bravery and dash. He was a gallant and efficient officer, but a person of eccentric character. His career in the service was long (he died a post captain in 1861), and his name was connected with many old sea stories, until it passed into what may be called the mythical folk-lore of the service, — stories of which he was the hero, gaining in incredibility by repetition from one generation of naval officers to another, until finally lost in the sudden transition to what is now called the new navy, and the total abandonment of early tradition as so much useless lumber. The rising generation of the navy has never heard of Mad Jack Percival and his escapades, desperate and comic; but thirty years ago no name was better known or oftener cited in wardroom mess talk. Davis was destined to be closely associated with him, and to serve under his immediate command for nearly two years.

Hiram Paulding was another of the lieutenants of the *United States*. He had a long and distinguished career in the service, beginning with Lake Champlain, where he served as midshipman and acting lieutenant under McDonough.<sup>1</sup> He retired with the rank of rear admiral in 1862; and during the whole of the civil war, although his age precluded his active employment afloat, he commanded the navy yard and station at New

<sup>1</sup> He was a son of John Paulding, one of André's captors.

York, and rendered most important service in the onerous and responsible duties connected with that great naval depot. He was greatly beloved in the service, and left an honored name. Among the midshipmen who afterwards reached flag rank were Thomas T. Craven and Henry Knox Thatcher. Andrew Hull Foote was a midshipman on board the *Peacock*, and was later transferred to the flagship, and came home in her. He was of the date of 1822, and had already made a cruise in the West Indies.

Attached to the squadron was the *Dolphin*, topsail schooner, of 180 tons burden and 12 guns, which vessel was tender to the flagship, and was officered and manned by a draft from that vessel. It would be difficult to form a conception of what the *Dolphin* was like by comparison with any existing type, as her class has long since disappeared, and cannot be compared with the modern schooner. She was a mere cock-boat alongside of the frigate, and her guns were nothing but six-pounders; but, notwithstanding her smallness and the insignificance of her armament, she made an interesting cruise of many thousands of miles among the remote, and at that time almost unknown, islands of the Pacific Ocean, and carried the flag where it had never been seen before on board a government vessel, and where it has since made some figure in the history of the world. Almost immediately after the arrival of the *United States* at Callao, Lieutenant Percival was appointed to command the *Dolphin*, and on August 31, 1824, Davis was also assigned to her. A year later, before she separated from the squadron for a



long and independent cruise, Lieutenant Paulding and several more midshipmen joined her. Among these was Charles H. McBlair, who had been, from the first days on board the *Guerrière*, an intimate of Davis's. Their friendship lasted until the breaking out of the civil war, and was resumed in after years. McBlair, who was from Maryland, made the mistake of resigning from the navy in confident anticipation of the secession of his State. He held a commission in the Confederate service, and after the close of the war he was for some time adjutant-general of the State of Maryland. He died in Washington, where he had settled in 1874, in November, 1890, and during the last few years of Davis's life much of the old intimacy had revived. They had been inseparable companions in early life.

Of all the officers of the *Dolphin*, Davis was the junior in years and rank when the ship sailed on her long voyage to the Western Pacific.

## CHAPTER II

### CRUISE OF THE SCHOONER DOLPHIN

IN the year 1824, the crew of the whaleship *Globe*, of Nantucket, mutinied in the Pacific Ocean, in latitude about eight degrees south, longitude one hundred and sixty degrees west, murdered the officers, and carried the ship to the Mulgrave Islands, where it was proposed by the chief mutineer, a man named Comstock, to burn her and form a settlement. Here a great part of the stores, the spare sails and rigging, and the boats were landed; but some members of the crew who had taken no part in the mutiny, taking advantage of being together on board the ship while the others were on shore, dropped the foresail and cut the cables just at the dusk of evening, and, making sail, stood out to sea with a fair wind.

The mutineers pursued the ship in the boats, as soon as they discovered that she was under way; but finding that she gained rapidly on them while it was fast growing dark, they abandoned the chase and returned to the shore.<sup>1</sup> The nautical instruments of every description had been taken on shore by the muti-

<sup>1</sup> *Narrative of the Mutiny of the Globe and the Cruise of the Dolphin in search of the Mutineers.* By Lieutenant Hiram Paulding. New York, 1831. The official log-book of the schooner *Dolphin*.

neers, so that the people on board the *Globe* were left to traverse a vast ocean studded with unknown dangers, without a chart, and with no other guide to direct their course than the stars and the prevailing winds. The Mulgrave Islands are situated in north latitude six degrees, east longitude one hundred and seventy-three degrees; and, although the passage of the *Globe* was necessarily very long, she finally reached Valparaiso in safety, and the American consul at that port was informed of the events which had transpired. As the war of independence was still in progress in Peru, American commerce and interests on the West Coast required the attention of the whole naval force then on the station, and no measures could be taken to bring the mutineers to account for their crimes until some time after the return of the *Globe* to the United States. In the following year, however, Commodore Hull was able to dispatch the *Dolphin* to search for the mutineers, who it was supposed would still be found where the *Globe* had left them,—at the Mulgrave Islands. Accordingly the *Dolphin* sailed from Chorillos on the 18th of August, 1825, and proceeded along the coast as far north as Payta, touching at several of the smaller ports, and purchasing such stores in each as the place afforded. From Payta she sailed for the Gallapagos Islands, where an abundant supply of turtles, both the land turtle of the island and the common sea turtle, was laid in. These creatures were kept alive, and were served out regularly to the crew as long as the stock lasted, instead of the ordinary allowance of salt provisions; proving not only a wholesome substi-

tute for the common sea diet, but a means of preserving the stores which it would be impossible to replenish among the islands. Sixteen days after leaving the Gallapagos, the Marquesas Islands were sighted, and the *Dolphin* stood in, and close alongshore, where "beautiful little valleys were presented to view in quick succession, with villages of palm-thatched cottages embowered in groves of cocoanut and bread-fruit trees, forming scenes of rural quiet calculated to fill the imagination with the most agreeable conceptions of the happy condition of the inhabitants." The *Dolphin* anchored at Nukahiva, in Comptroller's Bay.

At this time the Marquesas Islands were in an almost primitive state of savagery, being visited only occasionally for refreshment by whaleships, and but one missionary had ever visited the islands for a short time, and had made no impression on the people. The natives were not wholly unaccustomed to the sight of ships and their crews of white men, but they still retained their primitive customs, and were uncontaminated by contact with civilization. A war was raging between the rival tribes of Typees and Happahs, which inhabited opposite shores of the bay, and the people of both factions visited the ship, and were eager to obtain firearms in exchange for provisions and native manufactures of grass-cloth and weapons. The use of firearms was fully understood by these people, and a chief's importance depended on the number of muskets, kegs of powder, and flints which he possessed. The *Dolphin* also visited Massachusetts Bay, which was the scene of Commodore Porter's visit when refitting the *Essex*.

Here Commodore Porter had built a fort and established a navy yard; but in the short interval that had elapsed all traces of his works were obliterated by the luxuriant growth of tropical vegetation, and no vestiges of former occupation could be discovered. At Massachusetts Bay the ship was watered, and Lieutenant Paulding planted a quantity of fruit and vegetable seeds which had been brought from Peru, with the hope that their growth might prove a benefit to future navigators. The natives willingly assisted in this operation.

The *Dolphin* sailed from the Marquesas Islands on the 5th of October. The course now before her carried the schooner away from all the civilized world; and the islands in her way afforded little to tempt the navigators to visit them, being known only as places existing on the wide surface of the ocean, where, with few exceptions, the inhabitants had never seen the face of a white man. On the 10th, Caroline Island was sighted, and the *Dolphin* stood close in, under the lee of the coral reef, in hopes of finding an anchorage; but the deep water reached to within a few feet of the reef itself. However, a small kedge was taken to the coral bank, by which the ship rode to the easterly trade-wind, and a party landed on the reef to fish, finding fish plentiful in the holes and clefts of the reef, and easily taken with boarding-pikes and boat-hooks. At low water, when the party landed, the coral bank was nearly dry; but they were overtaken by the rising tide, which made it difficult and even dangerous to retrace their steps to the edge of the bank, the holes in the

reef being hidden under water. What made the situation of the party more disagreeable was the number of sharks which had come in with the tide, and which made dashes at the men as they stood waist deep on the reef or floundered in the holes, and had to be kept at bay by thrashing and lunging with the boat-hooks and pikes. One man, who had a large bunch of fish which he trailed through the water, was so closely pursued and fiercely attacked that he had to take refuge on a rock above water until the boat could come in to his relief.

Leaving Caroline Island, the *Dolphin* visited the Duke of Clarence and Duke of York Islands. The latter was noted on the chart as uninhabited when discovered by Commodore Byron in 1791, and the people of the *Dolphin* were therefore not a little surprised, on approaching it, to see two canoes put off from the shore. But on both of these islands the inhabitants were shy and wild, entirely unaccustomed to the sight of white men, and treacherous in their intercourse with people of the *Dolphin*. The next island sighted was Byron's Island, on November 9th, where the schooner anchored. Here she was soon surrounded by the canoes of the savages, which appeared in all directions as if by magic. The natives leaped on board without the slightest hesitation, and the decks were soon thronged with naked, shouting savages. They were soon detected in thieving, and, being all armed with shark's-tooth spears, they walked about the decks with a swaggering and aggressive air, and it was not until sundown that they were finally got rid of. The next

morning, as soon as day dawned, the whole ocean was whitened with the little sails of canoes which were seen approaching in every direction as far as the eye could distinguish so small an object. The scenes of the previous day were repeated. Not a word could be understood for this rabble of savages on deck and about the ship; and when they were pushed out of the way they became insolent and resentful. It was finally necessary to resort to violence to clear the decks, and in the skirmish an old athletic chief, whom Captain Percival had treated with some distinction, suddenly threw his arms about the captain and embraced him with herculean strength; but some of the *Dolphin's* men passed the bight of a rope round the old chief's neck and strangled him until they broke his grasp, and then pitched him overboard. A proper show of firmness was finally effectual in clearing the ship of savages.

The islands visited since leaving the Marquesas had afforded no refreshment, and it now became necessary to water the schooner. An effort was made to land for this purpose, but the determined hostility of the natives made the attempt fruitless, and only the great coolness and tact of Captain Percival saved the boat's crew from destruction at the hands of the savages. The natives dashed into the water (almost their native element), and attempted to drag the boat to land: in the midst of the confusion one of them snatched a pistol which he struggled violently to carry off, until he was shot from the boat and taken into the nearest canoe severely wounded. The boat now returned to the ship, and preparations were made for getting under way, when one

of the natives, numbers of whom were still on board, seized a musket with a fixed bayonet and jumping overboard with it swam toward the shore keeping under water half the time. He was fired at, but he bore his booty safely to shore and disappeared in the bushes. After this bold theft several boats were manned to land again in search of water and, if possible, to recover the stolen musket. Captain Percival again took the lead, and landed on the coral reef with his ammunition wet, whilst his boat, in returning through the surf, was thrown upon the reef, bilged, and before she could be got off every timber in her was broken. Captain Percival now forbade the other boats to attempt to land, choosing rather to remain in his defenseless situation on the reef, surrounded by hostile savages, than to risk the serious consequences of losing the remainder of his boats. By signals arranged before leaving the ship he directed a fire at intervals from the great guns against a large hut on the beach which was supposed to belong to the chief. The ignorance of the natives as to the real nature of firearms and the awe inspired by the discharge of the schooner's six-pounders were sufficient to keep the savages at bay. Finally a group of them approached him, one of whom, an old man, held a green branch in his hands. The captain demanded, by signs, the return of the musket, and the old man addressed one of those near him, who ran off, and in about an hour brought back the musket, but without lock or bayonet. These were also demanded, and the demand emphasized by another discharge of the schooner's guns toward the hut. It was not long



before the lock was brought, but no threats could induce them to relinquish the bayonet. The situation of Captain Percival and his party was now becoming more critical with every moment's delay. They were on a bank of coral a hundred yards wide, and small parties of savages from the great numbers assembled in the bushes that fringed the beach would occasionally sally out and throw stones at them; they had no other means of defense than the schooner's guns, which were fired whenever an attack was made. The hustle of the shot over their heads and the occasional fall of a cocoanut tree proved the superiority of these weapons over their own, and had, in a measure, the desired effect of keeping them in check. But although the shot sometimes struck very close and threw sand and gravel all over them, they were becoming bolder every minute. The captain, becoming impatient of his precarious situation on the reef, besieged and harassed as he was by the savages, made bold to risk an excursion back on the island, to show the natives his disregard for them, and at the same time to satisfy himself of the existence of water. Attended by his boat's crew, who held their pistols in readiness, though they were useless as the priming was wet, he advanced boldly up the beach, the natives retreating before him. This excursion was fruitless, however, the only place where water was found being an old well, which was brackish and stagnant. In the meantime Lieutenant Paulding, on board the schooner, was filled with anxiety for the captain and his party, and was relieved, after an hour's delay, to see Wil-  
return to their old place of blockade on the cor- had been

It was now sundown, and the surf had increased so much that it did not seem possible for a boat to reach the reef and return in safety, and to send men without a prospect of their return would be a useless sacrifice of life. But something must be done to get the party off before dark, and at this juncture two seamen who were good swimmers came forward and volunteered to take the lightest boat ashore. They landed in safety, and the small boat being deeply laden with the captain and his party, they clung with one hand to the quarter, swimming with the other, until after a prolonged and most doubtful struggle the boat emerged from the surf and was soon alongside.

The men of Byron's Island are described as short, active, and well-made. They were entirely naked and covered with scars, and only a few of them tattooed and those only slightly. Their ornaments were rude, and worn only by a few, and consisted of shells, and beads made of something that looked like whalebone, worn in long strings round the neck or waist. Some of them wore skull-caps made of grass, or wreaths of dry cocoanut fibre. The hair was long, the complexion very dark, and the beard thin and curled on the chin like a negro's. But few women appeared, and they were coarse and almost as robust as the men, and wore a small fringed mat about the loins. The canoes of these savages were ingeniously made of a great many pieces of light wood laced together with cocoanut without. The canoe sails were mats of straw or grass. and the soon as the captain's party got on board the the schooner made sail, and bade adieu to Byron's Island

and its inhabitants, whose acquaintance had been productive of little but perplexity and anxiety, and running a course west by south, in four hours Drummond's Island hove in sight ahead, distant four leagues. This island was found to be swarming with people, who at first exhibited more timidity than those of any of the islands yet visited. But they soon became bolder, and the scenes of Byron's Island were repeated, the savages visiting the ship in swarms and stealing whatever they could lay their hands on. All hope of watering here had to be abandoned, and the *Dolphin* made sail again and shaped a course for the Mulgraves.

The Mulgrave Islands are the southernmost group of the Radack chain of the Marshall archipelago, and form a circular or nearly circular group of coral islets. Their extent has, even to this day, not been well determined, but the surrounding reefs have been examined for forty miles, and only one passage for boats and one for ships found to exist. Some of the islands are mere coral rocks, submerged at high tide, but nearly all have deep water close to the reefs. When the reef reaches above the level of the sea it becomes covered with sand and vegetation forms, and some of the islands are of considerable size, and covered with cocoanut and bread-fruit trees. The passage from Drummond's to the Mulgrave Islands was nine days, and on November 19th the *Dolphin* anchored on a lee shore within less than a cable's length of the surf, at the easternmost of the islands.

The inhabitants here were of a different character. Wil-  
from those of Byron's and Drummond's islands had been

were hospitable and friendly. The schooner was watered here, and an immediate search began for the mutineers of the *Globe*. A whaler's lance and some pieces of canvas were found among the natives, who were sensibly alarmed by the thoroughness of the search and the questions put to them concerning the *Globe*. It was therefore determined to continue the search from island to island along the entire chain to the southward and westward, for it must be understood that Captain Percival did not know that the chain was circular in form, nor of the existence of the inland sea or lagoon, until he discovered these facts for himself in his progressive search. Accordingly the schooner, after several days' delay at the first anchorage, got under way and coasted along the land from island to island, keeping in company with the searching parties, which followed the course of the ship, and explored each island in succession. Some of these islands were sparsely inhabited; in others the population was more dense; and the natives were sometimes timid and shy and sometimes friendly, but never openly hostile. At one island a native came on board in a canoe, and as he was the only person who visited the ship, it was suspected that he came as a spy, a suspicion which was verified in the event, although, at the time, these people seemed too simple to adopt such an expedient of civilization.

On After examining several of the islands in this manner, the shore parties reached a spot where numbers of without natives were assembled, and where several of their and thevar-canoes were drawn up on the beach, and the schooner seen approaching across the lagoon. As

was afterwards ascertained, this was the high chief of all the group, with about a hundred of his chiefs and warriors on a cruise of observation to satisfy himself as to who and what the strangers were who had invaded his lonely and unfrequented domain. The chiefs had nothing to distinguish them, so that Captain Percival remained in ignorance of their identity, but this gathering of people, with their canoes, facilitated his search, and in fact some lids of seamen's chests, some pieces of cloth and ash spars, and some canvas were found among them. The natives were watching every look and action of the white men, and, notwithstanding their affected apathy and indifference, they could not conceal the intense excitement which this close examination produced among them. Not far from the beach was a grove of cocoanut and bread-fruit trees, through which was scattered a number of the neat little huts of the natives. One of these, near the shore, was frequented by a great many of the natives, with whom the *Dolphin's* people mingled freely. It was about ten feet high, and had a sort of garret floored with sticks interwoven with palm leaves. Although most of the huts had been examined, it was by good or ill fortune that this one, where so many of the natives were assembled, should have escaped search; for, had this taken place, one of the men who were the objects of the search, and the cause of the *Dolphin's* presence at the islands, would have been found, and the discovery would probably have resulted in the massacre of the shore party, which was greatly outnumbered by the savages. William Lay, one of the crew of the *Globe*, had been

brought to this island by the chiefs, to be used as circumstances might suggest, and lay concealed in the garret of this hut, guarded by a number of old women, who had been directed, at the first whisper of noise that he made, to put him to death. He therefore lay in this situation, listening for several hours to the voices of his countrymen, whose conversation revealed to him the character of the schooner and the object of her voyage.

At sundown the shore party returned to the ship for the night, and the natives, getting into their canoes, steered away across the lagoon toward the distant islands. The *Dolphin* stood off and on during the night, and the next morning anchored near where the parties had landed on the previous day. Here there was a channel into the lagoon, having nearly enough water for the schooner, and an attempt was made to warp her through, but had to be abandoned, as the water was found to shoal very rapidly on the bar or reef. The service had been arduous, as it was judged necessary to have strong parties on shore exploring the islands, and the remainder of the crew were really insufficient to work the vessel and to get her under way, which had to be done whenever the wind blew on shore, as there was no anchorage beyond half a cable's length from the reef. However, the same method of search was continued, the shore parties advancing from island to island, attended by a boat to carry them over the drowned reefs, and armed and provisioned to remain on shore, the schooner keeping abreast under sail, or anchoring in advance. In this manner the

search continued until the southernmost extremity of the group was reached, where the land trended away to the northward and westward. The discoveries were few and unimportant up to this point, and the search had already continued nearly a week, when the shore party, which was commanded by the second lieutenant, crossed a long reef which connected the southernmost island with the next to the westward, which had the appearance of being thickly settled from the number of cocoanut and bread-fruit trees, as the savages invariably build their huts in these groves. Soon after crossing the reef, and at the eastern extremity of the island, where the land was narrow and sandy, they came suddenly upon a place which was strewn with the staves of beef and pork barrels, pieces of canvas, clothing, and a general litter of rubbish which marked it as an abandoned site of habitation. Proceeding a little further, they found a skeleton, lightly covered with sand, and a box containing some Spanish dollars.<sup>1</sup> The savages, who had been in close attendance on the searching party, upon approaching this spot disappeared, or were seen skulking through the bushes. Proceeding a mile further, they found a deserted hut, in which they encamped for the night. Early in the morning they took up their line of march, but had not gone far when it became evident that the savages were preparing for hostilities. They were assembling in great numbers in front of the party, armed with spears and stones, and,

<sup>1</sup> The log-book states that this skeleton was supposed to be that of Comstock, the chief mutineer of the *Globe*. But the evidence upon which this theory was based does not appear.

being vastly more numerous than the seamen, the second lieutenant, who was still in command, decided to retreat to the place of encampment of the previous night, in which he would be better able to defend himself until he could obtain reinforcements and ammunition from the *Dolphin*. Upon reaching this place again, he found that the hut had been destroyed, and a large canoe, which had lain on the beach, had disappeared. He had lost sight of the natives, however, and, fortifying his party in this place as well as circumstances would permit, he remained here all day, sending two of his men to the schooner, which was now several miles distant. A little after midday these two arrived on board, and reported the situation of the shore party. There was now no doubt that this was the place where the mutineers of the *Globe* had landed, but where were they now? The parties from the ship had given the savages no cause for hostility; on the contrary, the most conciliatory course had been pursued in dealing with them, and, if they had wished to make war, opportunities had frequently occurred when the search parties might have been assailed by overwhelming numbers. They had not availed themselves of these, and now they were preparing for hostilities at the moment of the discovery of the place where the mutineers had been. The inference was, that these latter were among the savages, and that they had aroused the natives to war with the hope of successfully resisting arrest. If this surmise were correct, the situation of the shore party was critical, and no time was to be lost. Accordingly the launch was hoisted out



and fitted with all dispatch, and in the afternoon left the ship, in command of Lieutenant Paulding, with two midshipmen, of whom Davis was one, and eleven men, together with the couriers from the second lieutenant's party, which was all that could be spared from the schooner, as a bold attempt on her by a large party under an enterprising chief might have placed her in great jeopardy. The launch crossed the reef and ran down the lagoon to the encampment of the shore party, which she reached at eight o'clock in the evening, finding all safe, but looking for the appearance of relief with great anxiety. From information gained by the shore party during the day as to the movements of the savages, Lieutenant Paulding determined to pursue them in the launch, and he therefore sent the second lieutenant and his men back toward the ship, and, keeping only his own boat's crew, made sail on the launch and stretched away across the lagoon in pursuit of the parties of natives which had menaced the search party in the morning, and which had gone across the lagoon in their canoes. The launch was kept under way all night, and at daylight an island was discovered directly ahead, upon which Lieutenant Paulding determined to land, in order to give his men breakfast. The islands forming the northern boundary of the lagoon could now be seen on either bow, and, as soon as the launch was seen by the savages, numbers of canoes put off from them and landed upon the island for which the launch was headed. Two of these canoes passed close to the launch as she was beating up to weather an intervening reef; and these Lieutenant

Paulding arrested and searched, although each was manned with twenty savages armed with spears and stones. The intrepidity of this act, perhaps coupled with a vague fear of the effects of the white men's weapons, completely overawed the savages; but finding nothing in the canoes, Lieutenant Paulding suffered them to proceed. Drawn up on the beach of the island toward which they headed were about twenty large canoes, each of which would carry from thirty to forty men. The canoes which had been boarded sailed at least three miles to the launch's one, and it was evident that it would be impossible to arrest the mutineers of the *Globe* whilst they, or their allies the natives, had the disposal of such a fleet of vessels with which to elude their pursuers. Lieutenant Paulding, therefore, determined to capture the whole fleet of canoes, even though he should be opposed by the natives and reduced to the necessity of measuring his strength with theirs. The boldness of this plan, as will presently be seen, secured the accomplishment of the main object of the expedition.

The island toward which the course was directed was small, with few trees and consequently but a small number of huts, but there was a crowd of several hundred savages assembled on the shore. As Lieutenant Paulding approached he could see that they were sending their women and children to the huts, a movement which clearly indicated a disposition to hostility. However, the launch continued to advance, and as there was some surf on the beach a kedge was dropped outside the line of breakers, and the boat was in the act of veer-

ing to through the surf when a person in the guise of a native advanced from the crowd of savages on shore and addressed Lieutenant Paulding in English. He stood on the beach, thirty or forty yards from the launch and halfway between it and the natives, who had now seated themselves on the sand. The words which he uttered were "The Indians are going to kill you: don't land unless you are prepared to fight!" Although all were convinced that this was one of the men they had been looking for, the sensation created by his wild attire and sudden appearance, and above all by his words, seemed like the illusion of fancy. His hair was long, combed up and tied in a knot on top of his head; he was naked, except for a mat about the loins, and the action of the tropical sun, combined with the use of cocoanut oil, had tanned his skin as dark as that of a native. He repeated his warning with great earnestness, and in a few hasty words described the plan of the savages, which was to prevail upon the boat's crew to land and seat themselves among them, when on a given signal the savages would rise and knock them on the head with stones. This seemed probable enough, but still the knowledge that this was one of the mutineers rendered his conduct suspicious, especially as he had been eluding the searching parties instead of giving himself up at once, which he would naturally have done if he were innocent, or if he desired protection. Lieutenant Paulding asked him his name, and he said he was William Lay, one of the crew of the *Globe*. His stature answered to the description that had been furnished to Captain Percival of the individuals of the

*Globe's* crew. Lieutenant Paulding bade him come to the boat, but he replied that he was afraid to as the savages had ordered him to advance no nearer. He was then told to make a run for it, relying on the boat's crew for protection, but he again declined, saying that the savages would kill him with stones before he could reach the surf.

This colloquy had lasted but a very few minutes during which those in the boat had not ceased to veer slowly through the surf, while the natives had remained seated on the sand, evidently thinking that Lay was arranging their plan as directed; they now called on him to know what Lieutenant Paulding had said. The latter saw that he would gain by pretending to assent to the ruse, and directed Lay to answer accordingly. The boat having reached the shore he landed and formed the crew, leaving the boat-keepers in the boat with orders to be ready to haul out to the anchor at a moment's notice. Then at the word the men drew their cutlasses and pistols and advanced up the beach. Lieutenant Paulding seized Lay, and still doubting whether he were not more foe than friend, clapped a pistol to his breast and again exclaimed, "Who are you?" To this Lay replied, "I am your man," and burst into tears. Paulding turned instantly toward the crowd of savages and leveling his pistol bade Lay tell them that if they rose from their seats or threw a single stone he would kill them all. But Lay was completely overcome, and instead of complying with this command broke into hysterical and incoherent ejaculations, half in English and half in the native language. The sav-

ages leaped to their feet with threatening gestures ; but Paulding, supported by his crew, kept his pistol steadily leveled and sternly commanded Lay to repeat his threat. Several of the boldest continued to advance, but not finding themselves supported by their companions, they fell back, all except one unarmed old man. This was Lay's benefactor, or rather owner, who had saved his life, as Lay explained, at the general massacre of the *Globe's* crew, and who seemed much affected when Lay explained to him in a few words what his countrymen intended to do with him ; nor was Lay himself wanting in sensibility or gratitude in parting with him. However, no time was to be lost lest the savages should recover from their first surprise and make an attack. Lay was therefore hurried to the boat, cutting short this interview somewhat peremptorily, and the launch was at once hauled out through the surf, and was soon out of range of the savages' weapons.

This scene has been described in very nearly Lieutenant Paulding's own language. It made a lasting impression on those who witnessed it ; naturally so on the mind of a boy of eighteen, and in after life Davis was fond of recalling the adventures of this cruise. The fight with the sharks at Caroline Island, the hand-to-hand tustles at Byron's and Drummond's islands with naked savages covered with cocoanut oil and as slippery as eels, and above all this scene at the Mulgraves, and the boldness and nerve of Paulding, were many times recalled in familiar talk at home. A biographical sketch of Admiral Paulding appeared in "Harper's Magazine"<sup>1</sup> soon after his death, and

<sup>1</sup> February, 1879.

speaking of the cruise of the *Dolphin*, the author says: "Among the midshipmen was the late Rear Admiral Charles Henry Davis, who told the writer of this sketch that the boldest act he ever witnessed was performed by Lieutenant Paulding in the seizure of one of the mutineers in the face of a mob of infuriated savages armed with clubs and spears, . . . the natives being so much surprised at the audacity of the act that they made no attempt at recapture until it was too late."

As soon as the boat was out of danger from the savages, Lieutenant Paulding learned from Lay the following particulars: All of the mutineers of the *Globe* were dead except himself and another lad named Cyrus Huzzy. There had been a quarrel between the mutineers and the natives very soon after the escape of the ship, which had ended in a general massacre, the natives adopting the same method that they had intended to apply to Lieutenant Paulding and his boat's crew. Lay and Huzzy had been spared on account of their youth, and were enslaved by the natives. Huzzy was now on a neighboring island. Lay admitted that both he and Huzzy knew that the parties from the schooner were searching for them, but they had been closely watched and guarded by the natives ever since the *Dolphin* had been at the islands. The chiefs had sent a spy on board, who had counted the number of her guns, and within a very few of the number of her men. They had been kept constantly apprised of the force and motions of the search parties, and had seriously contemplated an attack on the *Dolphin*, and had

consulted Lay and Huzzy, but these had dissuaded the savages, assuring them that the schooner was invincible. They had even made the chiefs believe that the *Dolphin* could sink the islands with her cannon; but they still adhered tenaciously to the idea of destroying the invaders, and a variety of plans had been concocted by those chiefs who were considered the wisest and bravest, all of which had been submitted to Lay and Huzzy. Some of these plans gave evidence of superior intelligence and cunning, which it was hard to reconcile with their blind fear of the white man's superiority.

Having refreshed his crew, Lieutenant Paulding headed his boat for the island on which Huzzy was said to be, making for a village in front of which a single large canoe was hauled up on the beach. As the launch landed, the chief of the island approached, attended only by a few women. He was instantly seized, and commanded to produce Huzzy on pain of death. Some of the women ran off and presently appeared with Huzzy, who could easily have been mistaken for a native, except for his long yellow hair, which hung in ringlets on his shoulders. Lugoma — for such was the chief's name — manifested an extreme reluctance to part with his son, as he called Huzzy; but, though the latter owed his life to this old chief, and had been indebted to him for many acts of kindness, he had been living with him in a state of bondage, and had been made useful in many ways, and so the old man's reluctance was not altogether disinterested. However, Lieutenant Paulding cut short this colloquy by

ordering Huzzy into the boat; and, as Lugoma begged hard to accompany them, he was permitted to embark also, and accompanied the party during a part of its return journey to the ship. The day was now far advanced, and the launch started at once to return to the ship. They were joined by another boat from the *Dolphin*, which had been sent for news of them; and both boats anchored for the night at a point about twenty miles from Lugoma's island, where the chief landed the next morning, and the boats returned to the *Dolphin*.

So much has been told of the mutiny of the *Globe* and the search for the mutineers, in which Davis took so active a part, that it may not be out of place to complete the narrative by a brief recital of the facts learned by Captain Percival before the *Dolphin* finally left the Mulgrave Islands.

The mutiny had been headed by a man named Comstock, as already related, the other principal mutineers being Oliver, Paine, and the black steward. After the murder of the captain and three mates, Comstock, who was a boat-steerer, mustered the crew on the quarter deck and took command of the ship. He was the only one on board who could navigate, and he made the others swear allegiance. There were thirty-five or forty men and boys on board, and they all swore, those who had taken no part in the mutiny being in ignorance of the number involved, and being in terror of their lives. Very soon after the event the black steward was detected by Comstock in the act of loading a pistol. He was tried by a summary mock court, sentenced to death,



and hung at the yardarm. Comstock took the ship first to Drummond's Island, but here the natives were very numerous and thievish, and Comstock shot one of them, after which he was afraid to stay among them, so he came to the Mulgrave Islands, where he anchored and began to land the stores. A raft was made of two whaleboats and some spars, and on the first day some thirty barrels of beef and pork, sails, rigging, and a variety of other articles were landed. Comstock pitched a tent on shore, and on the second day began, with the ship's mechanics, to work on a whaleboat which he intended to raise upon and make larger. Paine was displeased at this, and a violent quarrel between the two ensued, so that Comstock was afraid to sleep that night in the tent, and went off to pass the night among the natives. Paine and Oliver agreed to kill him when he came back. Accordingly, the next morning, as he was seen approaching along the beach, they opened fire on him and killed him. Comstock seems to have been, although the greater scoundrel, a man of intelligence superior to the others, and he had probably formed a project of imitating the example of the mutineers of the *Bounty*, of whose settlement on Pitcairn's Island he had probably heard; for he had marked off the site for a town, and selected a spot for the church and the schoolhouse.

After Comstock's murder Paine took command. The natives had been extremely friendly, so that the mutineers were not in the least afraid of them, and many of them were constantly at the tent, eating and sleeping there. Paine had a native girl, who was afraid

of him, and ran away whenever she had an opportunity. He fired his musket at her several times, and at last kept her by putting her in irons. A few days after the ship escaped, some of the natives, who had been at the tent, stole a number of tools; so Paine gave some of his people muskets without cartridges (which he kept under lock and key), and sent them to the natives — a great number of whom were assembled not far off — to demand the stolen articles. The savages refused to give them up, and began to throw stones at the men, followed them toward the tent, and killed one of them. When the party got back to the tent, Paine ordered all the muskets brought to him and locked them up. A few hours after, the natives came to the tent as usual, but in greater numbers, and almost immediately the massacre began, Paine being the first man killed. Women and children participated in the slaughter, and the *Globe* people, who were unarmed and outnumbered, were knocked on the head with stones and clubs and run through with spears. Lay and Huzzy were the only ones spared. They were taken separately to other islands and became the property of their captors, and were harshly and cruelly treated at first, though their condition was afterwards somewhat ameliorated.

The simplest communities are not necessarily arca-dian, and the common contrasts of power and impotence, poverty and affluence, intelligence and ignorance, were noticeable among these people. Lay's captor was very poor and treated his slave with rigor, and starved him, and finally sold him to a chief, with whom he received better treatment. Huzzy became the property

of Lugoma, and was employed mostly on the water, in charge of the canoe, and was better treated. Lay and Huzzy were permitted to see each other about once a fortnight.

Before leaving the Mulgrave Islands, the southern part of the chain was surveyed by the officers of the *Dolphin*, and the schooner sailed all the way round the group, making a rough running survey of the whole. Through the influence of Lugoma, an interview was arranged with the principal chiefs, who were received on board ship, and an interchange of presents took place, Captain Percival profiting by the opportunity to read the chiefs a lecture on the subject of their treatment of the mutineers. While the *Dolphin* was at these islands the ship's surgeon died, and was buried on shore with military honors, his grave being marked with a metal plate suitably inscribed, spiked to the trunk of a bread-fruit tree under which he was buried. At the request of Captain Percival, the principal chief *tabooed* the surgeon's grave.<sup>1</sup> Captain Percival also planted a number of seeds of various kinds and loosed a pair of pigs. The son of the principal chief begged to be allowed to accompany the ship, but Captain Percival refused to take him.

The Mulgrave Islands at the time of the *Dolphin's* visit had almost never been visited by civilized man. Lieutenant Paulding made an interesting study of the islands and their people, from which it would be out of

<sup>1</sup> When these islands were visited by the U. S. S. *Narragansett* in 1872, the doctor's grave was found in good order, and the *taboo* was still respected.

place to quote at length. The community of natives presented a picturesque view of a people in a state of savage simplicity, whose confidence was easily won under fair treatment, and who were characterized by traits made familiar in the descriptions given by early navigators of the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands, while they were still unsullied by contact with civilized man, communication with whom has invariably led to the debasement of the native races. The islands were thickly inhabited, and the people sustained their simple existence by the cultivation of the cocoanut and bread-fruit, and by fishing. Now the islands are exploited by a German trading company, the missionary has taken full charge, and the native population has dwindled to a total of less than seven hundred. So little did these conditions appear probable in 1825 that the officers of the *Dolphin* expressed the opinion that the islands would seldom be visited again except by occasional whalers.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DOLPHIN — THE UNITED STATES — THE ERIE — EXAMINATION

THE *Dolphin* sailed from the Mulgrave Islands on the morning of December 9th and stood to the westward. She touched at Peddars Island the following day, and then shaped a course for the Sandwich Islands, stopping occasionally during the passage to verify certain reported discoveries of rocks and islands on the part of whaleships, then almost the only vessels that navigated these seas. Bird Island, the first land of the Sandwich Islands, was made on January 9th (1826), and such was the imperfection of the charts, and so little knowledge relating to these islands obtained at this time, that the *Dolphin* did not reach the anchorage at Honolulu until the 15th, six days after sighting Bird Island, and the port itself had no name in those days, being spoken of occasionally as Oonavoora, and sometimes as the Port of Wooahoo (Oahu). Still the islands, and especially the port of Honolulu, had already acquired some importance as a place of resort for whaling-ships, several American merchants were established there, and the missionaries were also represented, the head of the American mission being the famous Mr. Bingham, alluded to by Dana, in his "Two

Years before the Mast," as the godfather of one of his Kanaka shipmates. The *Dolphin* was the first United States vessel that ever visited the islands, and the presence of an American man-of-war was a matter of real importance to merchant ships and the Americans on shore. Honolulu was the favorite port of call for whaling-ships, and was at that time visited by about fifty American vessels annually. The months of January, February, and March being the least favorable for whaling, vessels left their cruising grounds and came here to refresh and refit. During the stay of the *Dolphin* there were more than twenty of these ships in port, some of which remained only a few days and others one or two months, according to their several necessities, and the seamen, after long confinement on board, were apt to be riotous and insubordinate on shore. Captain Percival had the satisfaction of being constantly useful to the masters of these vessels and to the whaling interest by restraining the violence of these men, and coercing them to a proper sense of obedience. The unruly were arrested, brought on board the *Dolphin*, and flogged at the gangway. Such were the powers and duties of the captain of a man-of-war in those days, and the presence of a government ship in a remote port frequented by merchant vessels was of active benefit to masters and owners. The *Dolphin* made a long stay at Honolulu, was hove down, and thoroughly repaired and refitted. The islands at this time were in the first stage of transition from barbarism to civilization. The natives were still naked savages, but were nominally converted to Christianity, and

were directed in matters of faith and doctrine by Mr. Bingham, whose influence was far-reaching, as he controlled the native chiefs and really represented in his own person the government of the islands. An incident illustrating the childlike character of these still simple savages occurred during the stay of the *Dolphin*. Some of the officers had made up a party for an excursion to Pearl River, under the guidance of one of the American residents. The day chosen was a Saturday, and they were to pass the night at the habitation of an old chief, who was not apprised in advance. They found the old man evidently disconcerted at the appearance of so large a party of uninvited guests, and when told that they wanted supper he replied that it was the Sabbath, and neither then nor the next day could a fire be kindled, as it was forbidden by the Almighty. When asked how he knew that it was forbidden by the Almighty, he said that Mr. Bingham had seen the Almighty, who had told him so. This was rather a damper on the promised enjoyment of the excursion, but fortunately a native named Joe Banks, who had been brought along as cook and interpreter, came to the rescue. Joe Banks had no more mind to fast than the others, and not being wanting in volubility he harangued the old chief to such effect that a fire was soon kindled and a pig and a kid brought up for slaughter. The real force of his argument was lost to the officers, as it was unintelligible. There was an epidemic of influenza at the islands during the *Dolphin's* stay, from which the crew suffered; and, in fact, both in Honolulu and on the voyage to Valparaiso

there was much sickness on board. The hardships of a sea life at that time can hardly be appreciated now. The ship was small and crowded; water was carried in wooden casks, and became foul and nasty, and even of that the allowance was very small; salt provisions were exclusively used at sea, and bread became mouldy and infested with weevils; the nature and treatment of scurvy, a terribly common disease on board ship, was entirely unknown. The commonest rules of ship hygiene, so thoroughly applied in modern ships, were totally neglected; and finally, the ship had lost her surgeon at the Mulgrave Islands. Many men and almost all the officers were on the sick list at various times. Captain Percival was ill for a good part of the voyage after leaving Honolulu, and the service for those who remained fit for duty must have been indescribably harassing, for the ship was sailing in an unknown sea full of doubtful islands and unreported dangers, and vigilance could never be relaxed. As the *Dolphin* drew toward Valparaiso she approached high latitudes at the stormy season of the year, with a crew enervated by sickness and by long exposure in the tropics. For a vivid picture of sea life in those days read Dana's splendid narrative of the homeward voyage of the *Alert* round Cape Horn, less than ten years later, the great prose epic of the sea.

The *Dolphin* sailed from Honolulu on the 11th of May, and on the night of June 7th land was discovered close aboard. As this land did not appear on the chart the *Dolphin* lay to for the night, and in the morning discovered an unknown island, one of the out-



lying islands of the Society group, to which Captain Percival gave the name of Hull Island, in honor of the commodore.<sup>1</sup> Continuing her voyage the schooner touched at Raiatea and Lubai of the Society Islands, and at the latter island she remained a week. It was here that the mutineers of the *Bounty* made their first landing and built a fort, but were forced to abandon the settlement on account of the hostility and treachery of the natives. They had a war here with the savages and killed a good many of them, and if their estimate of the number of inhabitants is nearly correct, the population must have already greatly diminished at the time of the *Dolphin's* visit. The distance from the Society Islands to Valparaiso is about three thousand five hundred miles, but the *Dolphin* had been steered well to the southward for the benefit of the westerly winds, and so the wind was fair for most of the voyage. Provisions began to run low, and the tarro or yam of the Society Islands was used instead of bread. It was with a feeling of relief that the island of Mas-a-fuera was sighted on the afternoon of July 19th. Juan Fernandez was in sight the next morning; and from these islands to the coast of Chili the run in is always with a fair wind, so that the *Dolphin* anchored at Valparaiso on the 26th. Captain Percival not finding the commodore here, sailed for Callao, where he joined the flag on the 20th of August, after an absence of a year. The officers and men of the *Dolphin* were transferred to the *United States*, a new detail from the frigate relieving

<sup>1</sup> Hull Island lies to the southward of the Society group and about midway between the Austral and Hervey or Cook islands.

them, and Lay and Huzzy were included in this general transfer and became members of the frigate's crew.

The war in Peru was over, the castle of Callao, the last stronghold of Spanish royalty, having been surrendered on the 24th of January, 1826, the *United States* being the first vessel to salute the Peruvian flag; and Commodore Hull was expecting his relief on the station. Accordingly the *United States* sailed for Valparaiso, where she found the *Brandywine*, frigate, with Commodore Jacob Jones, Commodore Hull's successor. The *United States* hoisted the red pennant, the two frigates sailed together on January 24, 1827, and, after an exchange of salutes at sea, parted company, the *Brandywine* standing to the northward and the *United States* homeward bound. The passage round Cape Horn was made without incident. The ship touched at Bahia, Barbados, and St. Thomas, and anchored in Raritan Bay on April 23d, eighty-nine days from Valparaiso. The next day, the wind being fair, she got under way, stood up through the Narrows and anchored in the North River, and on the 30th she was towed to the navy yard and paid off, the navy yard people taking charge of the ship, and the officers proceeding to their homes.

Perhaps the story of this first cruise in the Pacific has been written at too great length. A biography should summarize unimportant events in order to dwell at length on those of greater consequence, and the whole of the cruise of the *United States* and *Dolphin* might have been summed up in a single paragraph. Lieutenant Paulding's book offered abundant material,

and the temptation to rewrite a forgotten chapter in the history of the service, even at the risk of irrelevancy, was irresistible. But there is another reason, or perhaps rather another excuse, which may justify the story of this cruise, and that is, the desire to present, as vividly as possible, the contrast between the education of the young officer, in the days when the best field of training was still believed to be the sea, and the purely academic course pursued at the present day. Davis was barely twenty years old when he finished this cruise, in which he had borne his share in peril and adventure, and, more important still, his share of responsibility. Farragut was thirteen in the action between the *Essex* and *Phæbe*. The officers of the old service who attained distinction were characterized not only by a thorough acquaintance with their profession, but by sound judgment, firmness, readiness, and decision. What part of this was the effect of an early experience in fighting and danger and adventure, and, above all, in responsibility? Were these traits inherent in the men themselves, and would they have been as strongly developed within the walls of a rural college on the banks of a shallow stream one hundred and fifty miles from the ocean? The wisdom of the present generation has answered the last question unhesitatingly in the affirmative, and the arguments for the purely academic training of sea officers are held to be unanswerable. The salient requirements of the naval profession remain the same, whether the ship moves under oars or sails or steam; and while (to borrow a phrase from a recent English writer) the

young officer of to-day has been taught how each thing ought to be done, the young officer of the old service knew how to do it. Whatever the defects of the old system may have been, it produced, in Davis's case at least, not only an accomplished officer, but a scholar and a student of science. As has been said before, the result of the old system was the survival of the fittest. The hundreds who failed in the race and dropped by the wayside have long since been lost sight of and forgotten. Now the whole mass of original material is worked up to the common standard, and every individual succeeds.

A leave of absence of three months, which Davis passed at his father's house in Boston, succeeded the cruise in the Pacific; and in July, 1827, he received his warrant and an appointment to the *Erie*, sloop-of-war, fitting at New York for the West India station. He reported on board the *Erie* on the 3d of August, in time to take part in the preparation of the ship for sea, the fitting and rigging being performed by her own crew under the direction of her own officers.

There is no event of special interest connected with the cruise of the *Erie*. The squadron in the West Indies was commanded by Commodore Ridgeley, and consisted of the *Natchez*, *Hornet*, *Erie*, and *Falmouth*, sloops, and the *Grampus* and *Shark*, schooners. Piracy in the West Indies, so long a scourge to commerce, had been for the time suppressed, although occasional rumors of renewed acts of piracy had created recent uneasiness. Commodore Porter, who was then in the service of Mexico, had issued a proclamation inviting

all those who were disposed to fit out privateers, to cruise against Spain, to apply to him for commissions; and two of these vessels had used the port of Key West as a rendezvous from which to carry on belligerent operations. In addition, political convulsions in several of the countries bordering on the Gulf of Mexico, and the want of any regularly organized governments in many of the ports, offered grounds for apprehension as to the safety of American commerce and the rights of American citizens. These causes were sufficient to keep the small squadron constantly employed.

The *Erie*, under the command of Master-Commandant Daniel Turner, sailed from New York on the 28th of August to join Commodore Ridgeley's squadron. A week out, the ship encountered a hurricane, in which she made very bad weather indeed. As the storm increased, sail was reduced on the ship until she lay to under storm-staysails, laboring heavily and shipping heavy seas, so that the waist and berth deck were flooded, the wind at E. S. E., and, with the sea, increasing momentarily. Under these circumstances, Captain Turner adopted the doubtful expedient of scudding under bare poles. Nothing whatever was known of the laws of storms at that time, for it was several years later that Mr. Redfield published his theory of the storms of the Atlantic coast. Probably the *Erie* was directly in the track of the storm centre, and in scudding before the wind she was sailing round the storm circumference. Finally, on the fourth day of the gale, the ship was brought to under main storm-staysail and storm-mizzen, when the wind immediately abated.

Several years later, in connection with other scientific work, Davis took up Redfield's theory, and used this gale of the *Erie* as an illustration. Seamen up to that time were guided by limited common sense and their own experience, and the expedient of scudding was one which was generally adopted then, but which no seaman in his senses would think of resorting to now, except in certain well-defined contingencies.

The *Erie* continued to cruise on the West India station, visiting Pensacola, Key West, Havana, Santiago de Cuba, and Matanzas, and passing a good deal of time at sea, until in April, 1828, she joined the commodore at Pensacola. When the *Dolphin* was at the Sandwich Islands, Captain Percival had received intelligence that the American ship *London* was ashore on a neighboring island, and the master of her begged assistance, as besides a valuable cargo he had a treasure in specie and bullion on board, and the natives had already plundered a part of the cargo. The *Dolphin* was dismantled and refitting, but Captain Percival chartered an American merchant brig, and, putting part of the crew of the *Dolphin* on board, took Davis with him, and proceeded to the scene of the wreck. He found the ship, as represented, in distress, the natives plundering her, and the crew in a state of mutiny. Captain Percival rescued the greater part of the stolen goods, transferred the most valuable part of the cargo and the treasure to the brig, and remained by the wreck for a week, until the whole of the cargo had been loaded into native boats and transferred to Honolulu. When all this had been effected, the master of

the *London* refused to pay the charter-party of the brig which had been employed for his relief, and Captain Percival adopted the summary process of deducting the amount from the treasure which was still in his possession. Upon his return to the United States the master had procured an indictment against Percival, and the latter was arrested as soon as he reached New York and brought to trial. He was acquitted, but the master of the *London* was not satisfied, and began a series of complaints to the Navy Department, assailing Percival's character and his general conduct while in command of the *Dolphin* at the Sandwich Islands, and he had succeeded in enlisting the support of the Board of Foreign Missions by representations relating to Percival's intercourse with the natives and missionaries. It was a very mixed-up business, the details of which are not worth notice; but Captain Percival asked for a court of inquiry, which was ordered to meet at the Boston navy yard, and as Davis was the principal witness, Commodore Ridgeley was directed to detach him from the *Erie* and send him home. Thus it transpired that he found himself on shore again after a cruise of less than a year in the West Indies. This short cruise was altogether unimportant, but it had served to cement the intimacy already existing with Foote, who was in the same squadron, first on board the *Natchez* and later in the *Hornet*. Davis was now looking forward anxiously to his examination, for he had served his time as midshipman and was now entitled to it; and Foote had already passed successfully. Hoppin, in his *Life of Foote*, says: "Admiral Davis says of this

examination that Foote and himself got news of it together, and the question was, how to get ready. They at once set about their preparation with great earnestness, consulting what books they had access to, but chiefly making practical observations and reducing the science of their profession to a regular working system." This must refer to the cruise of the *United States*, when the impending examination was doubtless a subject of anxious discussion in the steerage on the passage home, for Foote was of the date of 1822, and passed his examination in April, 1827. In fact Davis, writing from the Mississippi River in 1862, when he relieved Foote in front of Fort Pillow, alludes to their studies as boys, and says that he and Foote wrote a book on seamanship together. The examination must have been an ordeal, considering the total lack of regular instruction for midshipmen on board ship. Still, there were some facilities for those who chose to apply themselves to learn. Navigation would be taught by the sailing-master to promising pupils, and in the daily practice of duty they were learning seamanship as a child learns to swim. Gunnery was a comparatively simple art in those days, the intricacies of applied mechanical science on board ship can hardly be said to have existed at all; and it is not probable that much time at the examination was devoted to the humanities.

The court of inquiry in Captain Percival's case met as ordered at the Boston yard, and Davis had the satisfaction of aiding materially in the vindication of his late commander; and he now addressed the Navy Department, asking for a leave of absence in order to



prepare for his examination, writing: "I trust that it will not be irrelevant to remind the department that I have hitherto been almost constantly employed on active service, and therefore deprived of those superior advantages of study and theoretical improvement to be possessed on shore, to enjoy which, rendered doubly important as they are by the near approach of my examination, is the object of my present application." The department was graciously pleased to grant "leave unlimited," and Davis set himself seriously to work to prepare for the examination, at the same time renewing his early friendships and associations in Boston, and entering heartily into the social amusements of his father's friends. Those who remembered him at this time have described him as a young man of handsome person and engaging manners, and a favorite in society. His father's house was a centre of hospitality; his sisters were young girls in society; and he entered the social world of Boston with every advantage, without, however, abating his diligence in study. He had not enjoyed his leave of absence long before he received orders to report for duty on board the receiving ship at the Charlestown yard. This was a serious interruption to his projected plan of study, so he ventured to address a respectful remonstrance to the department, reminding it of the leave of absence so lately granted, and the purpose for which it had been asked, and requesting a revocation of the unwelcome order. Again the department favored his application, and leave unlimited was renewed.

On October 28th Davis received notice to attend the examination to be held at the New York station for

candidates of the date of 1823, so he went at once to New York and took up his residence in Brooklyn among his classmates, who were beginning to assemble in numbers, and for the convenience of the navy yard, at which place the meetings of the board were to be held. No record of this examination, or of its form exists. The whole examination was a most lengthy process, as it involved the whole number of the date, or as many of them as chose to compete for permanent standing in the service; and, although the examination of a single candidate may have occupied only a few days, the board, composed of three post-captains, was in session throughout the winter. The whole time was probably divided into periods, and the whole class may have been examined in one branch before the next was taken up. Davis was not discharged from attendance before the board until the end of February, 1829, and, as he had notified the department that he should continue his residence in Brooklyn until the decision of the board in his case was made public, he did not return to Boston until the middle of April.

The date of 1823 had entered eighty-nine strong. Of this number, only thirty-nine passed the examination. They first appear arranged in order of rank as passed midshipmen in the Register for 1831, and Davis's name stands number six on the list. Of the five who passed above him, only one, Henry K. Hoff, reached flag rank, and was still in the service at the close of the civil war; nor does the list of those below him show the names of many who reached high rank or distinction in the service.

## CHAPTER IV

### SAILING-MASTER AND LIEUTENANT — THE ONTARIO — THE VINCENNES AND VERMONT — THE INDEPENDENCE

WHILE waiting in New York for the result of his examination, Davis applied to the department for the appointment of acting sailing-master to the *Concord*, sloop, and, not receiving an immediate reply, he renewed his application after his return to Boston in May. The *Concord* was a new sloop of 22 guns, built in 1828, and fitting at Portsmouth; but she did not finally get to sea until early in the year 1831, and Davis could not afford to wait so long, as service as a passed midshipman was important if an appointment as sailing-master could be had. The examination gave him the right to a lieutenant's commission so soon as a vacancy for him should occur, and to pass the intervening time as sailing-master of a ship was of the greatest professional advantage. He was, therefore, gratified to receive, early in June, his orders to join the *Ontario*, fitting at New York for the Mediterranean station, as acting sailing-master.

The *Ontario* was a fine vessel of 22 guns, and the cruise which followed has been a famous one, not so much for any achievement or particularly important service as because the ship was a crack ship, and the

officers a particularly capable set of men, several of whom made their mark in the service. The station, too, was a favorite one, and the best possible school for a young officer; and the squadron was commanded, during the greater part of the cruise of the *Ontario*, by Commodore James Biddle, an officer whose professional standing was very high, and who impressed his character on the squadron under his command. Du Pont was a lieutenant on board the *Ontario*, and Dahlgren was a midshipman. The latter preserved a journal kept during a part of the cruise, from which his biographer has quoted at length. Later in the cruise, and after Davis had received his commission and had become one of the regular lieutenants of the ship, he was succeeded as sailing-master by his friend, Charles McBlair, who had come out in the *John Adams*. Although there were many changes among the officers during the three years which the ship remained on the station, Davis and Du Pont remained in her and came home in her. This was the beginning of an intimacy which never flagged, and which lasted through life. Another of the lieutenants was George N. Hollins, who stood at the very head of the profession in those days as an officer and seaman. By vacancy he became first lieutenant during the cruise, and came home in the ship in that capacity. Hollins went South and entered the Confederate service, and commanded on the Mississippi in 1862, when Davis met and defeated the Confederate fleet at Fort Pillow and destroyed it at Memphis.

The *Ontario* sailed from New York in August, 1829,

carrying out as passengers the newly appointed consul to Algiers with his family. Eighteen days out of port, one of those accidents occurred which are sufficient in themselves to account for many instances of losses at sea, in which vessels which sail in perfect trim are never heard of again. Such was a fate which the *Ontario* only escaped by a very narrow margin. The ship had encountered strong gales and very unsettled weather, the wind hauling from southwest to northwest; and while lying to under maintopsail close reefed and storm-staysails, at four o'clock in the morning of September 9th, she was struck down by a tremendous squall that laid the ship on her beam-ends. In an instant, and notwithstanding that the ship was battened down, the lower deck was flooded; men tumbled out of their hammocks against the beams, and, forcing up the gratings, the stream of people from below contended in the hatchways with the stream of water from above. Davis always said that Hollins, who was lieutenant of the watch, saved the ship. With instant presence of mind, he cut the maintopsail sheets himself, and, heading a small party, worked his way forward and boarded the fore tack. With the helm hard up, the ship payed off slowly and righted, deep with the weight of water she had taken on board. The berth deck was scuttled and the pumps rigged, and Hollins, taking his station at the taffrail, conned the ship, scudding under headsail alone before the tremendous seas. This gale was notable as that in which the sloop of war *Hornet* was probably lost. She had sailed from the West India station about the same time that the *Ontario* had left

New York, and was never heard of again. She must have been some hundreds of miles to the southward and westward of the *Ontario's* position during the gale, and the officers of the latter always believed that she was struck down and perished in an accident like that in which the *Ontario* was so nearly lost.

The ship anchored at Gibraltar on September 19th, and during the three years she remained on the station she was employed on the ordinary cruising incident to the service, and the winters were passed at Port Mahon. Almost the first duty required of the *Ontario* was a visit to Algiers, then still an independent power, where the consul was landed. In a second visit to the same port, the *Ontario* carried the last payment of tribute to the Barbary powers, for while she was still at the port the French squadron, which was to reduce Algiers, appeared in the offing. In November, 1830, Davis took a watch and division as one of the regular lieutenants of the ship, although he still continued to perform the duties of sailing-master until he was relieved by his friend McBlair in June, 1831, and at the same time Captain T. H. Stevens, who had brought the ship out, was relieved by Captain W. L. Gordon.

While the *Ontario* was lying at Smyrna she was visited one day by an Austrian admiral, who was honored with the usual salute on leaving the ship. Unfortunately, one of the *Ontario's* guns happened by an oversight to have been left shotted,<sup>1</sup> and the shot

<sup>1</sup> A ship of war always loaded her battery immediately after leaving port, and generally, in time of peace, drew the shot from her guns on entering a friendly port.

passed through the main boom of a Dutch brig of war, cut away the main lift and brace of a French brig of war, and lodged in the held of an Austrian merchant ship. It is related that one of the crew of the Dutch brig was killed by splinters from the boom. There was very great mortification on board the *Ontario* at the result of the accident, and apologies were tendered by the captain in person, which were graciously received by the Dutch captain with the assurance that it was a matter of very little consequence as there were plenty more Dutchmen in Holland. Tradition survived for many years after Port Mahon had been abandoned as the headquarters of our station in the Mediterranean, of the glories of that port as naval winter quarters, when the fleets of several nations were assembled in the harbor and the officers met in social pleasures on shore. Dahlgren left in his journal a vivid picture of the scene. But it was not in amusement alone that Davis filled the leisure of the three years of this cruise, although it was an exceedingly interesting one to him on account of the nature of the service and the historical interest attaching to every mile of the Mediterranean and every port visited. During this cruise he became proficient in navigation and the duties of his profession. He entered on a systematic course of reading, and he also studied the languages; and he retained through life a thorough proficiency in French and Spanish, and a good smattering of Italian, which he gained on this cruise. Commodore Biddle established, perhaps for the first time in our service, the practice of demanding from captains a report on the qualifications of officers. Captain Gor-

don in his report on the officers of the *Ontario* says: <sup>1</sup> "Lieutenant C. H. Davis is intelligent in his profession, energetic in his character, and devoted to the improvement of his mind. His country may anticipate much from him." This is probably a fair summary of his character as a very young man.

From many causes, therefore, this cruise left a lasting impression on Davis's mind and a deep trace on his character, and he was always fond of reverting to it in after life. More than thirty years after this cruise was over, and when the civil war had brought to the navy its bitterness in the severance of those ties of affection and fraternity which had existed for so long, Davis wrote to Du Pont: "I have lately gone back in my thoughts to our early association which began in 1829, thirty-three and a half years ago, — the time allotted to a generation of men. Our friend Shakespeare says in one of his historical plays, 'What youth is there who, if he could foresee the future events of his life, would not rather lie down and die than run the race that is set before him?' The same wise Providence that keeps the lower animal ignorant of his fate, so that 'he licks the hand that's raised to shed his blood,' conceals from us also, its reasoning agents, the purposes of its wisdom. If during one of those merry feasts for which the hospitality of the *Ontario* was famous, while seated at the table with our guests from the *Constellation*, the

<sup>1</sup> By a curious coincidence, while the author was on duty in the Navy Department, this letter was picked up by one of the clerks of the same office, among a lot of old papers which had been sent to the furnace-room to be burned.



veil of the future could have been pushed aside for a moment, the effect would have been like that produced on the revelers who, after draining the cup, discovered that the wine had been poisoned." These are bitter words, but written in bitter times.

The *Ontario* returned to the United States, and was paid off at Norfolk in May, 1832, and the officers were granted leave of absence. Davis returned to Boston and passed a year of uninterrupted leisure until, in April, 1833, he was placed on duty on board the receiving ship at the Boston navy yard. Receiving-ship duty is always irksome and disagreeable. It brings the confinement of life on board ship without the excitement and interest of service at sea, and without the incentives to diligence and zeal to be found in a regularly commissioned ship. It is unimproving duty professionally, and in this instance it was entirely unsuited to Davis's tastes and bent of mind. He had already begun to turn his thoughts toward scientific occupation, and the goal at this time was the newly organized coast survey. He therefore applied for duty on the survey, and, as his letter shows how small were the beginnings of that great establishment, it is given entire: —

U. S. RECEIVING SHIP COLUMBUS,  
May 23, 1833.

SIR, — I have the honor respectfully to request orders for the coast surveying service, which is to be conducted under the superintendency of Mr. Hassler. I beg to solicit from the department a favorable consideration of this request, and to be remembered as an applicant for this service, provided

the department do not think proper to indulge me with immediate orders.

Very respectfully,

LIEUT. C. H. DAVIS.

Hon<sup>ble</sup> LEVI WOODBURY, Secretary of the Navy.

This letter is indorsed, "How many officers needed?" "All that have been asked for by the Treasury Department have been ordered, viz., Lieut. Bell and Midshipman Henderson."

Davis made another application for the same duty in June, which was indorsed, "Name entered as an applicant. But no officer of his grade needed in the survey at present."

Captain Alexander Wadsworth, who had commanded the *Constellation* in the Mediterranean during Davis's service in the *Ontario*, and who had also served as a member of the Percival court of inquiry, was one of Davis's earliest friends in the service, and was also a friend of his father. This officer was appointed during the summer of 1833 to command the squadron in the Pacific, and his flagship, the *Vincennes*, was fitting for sea at the Norfolk yard. Having failed in his effort for duty on the coast survey, Davis now applied for the *Vincennes*. The complement of officers was already filled, but by persistent effort, and the interest and assistance of Commodore Wadsworth, he succeeded, and was appointed as a supernumerary lieutenant to the ship and flag lieutenant to the commodore. He joined her at Norfolk in October, and, a vacancy occurring, he became one of the regular watch officers. The *Vincennes* sailed early in November, and reached Rio de Janeiro

on January 4, 1834, where she remained only a few days. She had a long and hard passage round Cape Horn, encountering much ice, and reached Valparaiso early in March. At Callao the *Vincennes* fell in with the *Dolphin*, which was officered and manned by a detail from the flagship. This must have served to recall very vividly to Davis the events of his first cruise.

It would be uninteresting to dwell at length on the events of this short cruise. To recall them would only be to rehearse an insignificant chapter of the interminable civil turbulences and revolutionary disputes which form the whole early history of the South American republics, and which lose the importance which might attach to any one of them singly by the frequency of their recurrence. It would be next to impossible to write the history of these revolutions, and it would also be a futile task, for nobody would care to read it. Political agitation, based on personal ambition and a total disregard of the principles of civil liberty as understood in this country, forms the whole groundwork of their institutions. By the constitution of several of these states, the inherent right to revolt is guaranteed, and at the same time the Roman Catholic religion is established by the state and religious liberty denied. Such a condition is not calculated to insure peace or political stability. One ambitious demagogue succeeds another in the supreme control of the government, the duration of each reign depending on the personal ability and activity of the incumbent, whose career is frequently terminated by assassination. Such, for the

first half century at least of their independent existence, was the common history of the South American republics. For the purposes of this memoir, it is quite sufficient to say that the *Vincennes* passed a great deal of time in the Guayaquil River guarding American interests in the civil disturbances agitating the state of Ecuador; for coeval with the development of this political condition came the wide extension of American commerce, and United States vessels of war in South American waters were fully occupied in guarding the complex interests of our citizens abroad. In September the *Vincennes* was again at Callao, and the American consul at Lima applied to the commodore for an officer to take charge of the bark *Vermont*, which had lost her captain by the misconduct or mutiny of a part of the crew. At his own solicitation, Commodore Wadsworth gave Davis permission to take charge of this ship and return with her to the United States, directing him to report by letter to the Navy Department on his arrival home. With three midshipmen from the *Vincennes* as watch officers,<sup>1</sup> Davis took command of the *Vermont*, sailed from Callao on September 14th, and for the fourth time made the passage round Cape Horn, reaching New York in February, 1835, where he reported his arrival by letter to the Navy Department, and, being granted leave of absence, went immediately home.

Davis's father, the solicitor-general, who was now in

<sup>1</sup> Midshipmen O. H. Perry, J. B. Dale, and Stephen Decatur, good navy names. These young gentlemen went home in the *Vermont* for their examination, and all passed. Perry resigned in 1849, Dale died in 1848, and Decatur died a commodore on the retired list in 1876.

old age, had resigned his office and retired from active life, and had settled in Cambridge while his son was in the Pacific on board the *Vincennes*. As he had no ties of his own, Cambridge, therefore, became Davis's home, and continued to be his place of residence until the close of the civil war. During the period which followed his return with the *Vermont*, he was sometimes on leave of absence, and part of the time again on duty on board the receiving ship at the Boston yard. His father died in October, 1835, but his sisters remained in Cambridge, and it was at this time that the close intimacy with Professor Benjamin Peirce began. They were later allied by marriage, but at this time Peirce had just begun his career as professor of mathematics at Harvard, and he and his wife and sister-in-law were intimate with Davis's sisters. In Peirce's companionship, and under his guidance, Davis took up the serious study of mathematics, for which he had a natural fondness, and, though he could not follow the transcendent flights of Peirce's genius, he acquired a working familiarity with mathematical tools, and his studies at this time stimulated the analytical bent of his intellect, and determined, to a great degree, his future career, in which he did some good mathematical work. This intercourse with Peirce, and with others of the faculty in Cambridge, and his mathematical studies, tended to confirm the inclination toward scientific pursuits which had been manifested in 1833 in his application for duty on the coast survey; and, although it was several years still before he actually began his career in almost the only field of research

then open to the navy, his studies date from this period. So, too, from this time the intimacy with Benjamin Peirce, which lasted through life, took the place of brotherly affection, which he had not known<sup>1</sup> since boyhood.

In the autumn of 1836 Davis was ordered to report to Commodore John B. Nicolson for duty in connection with the recruiting service in Boston, and by the latter directed to open a rendezvous for the enlistment of seamen for the Brazil station; and in January, 1837, he was assigned to the razee *Independence*, Commodore Nicolson's flagship. He kept a journal of this cruise, which, like that of the *Ontario*, was an interesting one on account of the ground covered, as well as from the character of the ship and her officers. The *Independence* was the largest frigate in the world at that time. The flatulent dullness of newspaper writers has so hackneyed that phrase in descriptions of the several ships of the new navy, one after another, that it is stupid to employ it; only, in the case of the *Independence*, it happens to be literally true. She had been built for a seventy-four, and razeed one deck, and in no navy of the world was there a frigate of such proportions. To display this magnificent ship in the northern ports of Europe, which American men-of-war seldom visited, was one of the objects of the cruise. She carried out the United States minister to Russia, Mr. Dallas, with his family, and visited first the English ports of Ryde and Southampton, where her appearance excited universal

<sup>1</sup> But one of Davis's brothers lived to grow up. Frederick Hersey Davis, his senior by twenty years, died in Louisiana in 1840.

interest. She sailed from Boston in May, under the command of Commodore Nicolson, with Alexander Slidell — who afterwards changed his name to Mackenzie — as first lieutenant. He was the brother of the Slidell who was captured in the *Trent* with Mason, and was a man of some literary attainment. Several years later he acquired notoriety by his action, while in command of the brig *Somers*, in hanging at the yard-arm a midshipman and two seamen who were suspected of mutinous conspiracy. Although acquitted by a court martial, the stigma of this act never left him, and he was never employed again. Of the other lieutenants, — Hoff, Davis, Lardner, Poor, and Strong, — all lived to attain the highest rank in the navy. The purser of the ship was Thomas Breese, who enjoyed a wider popularity, and was perhaps more universally beloved, than any man in the service. The ship was a very happy and harmonious one. On the passage out, the presence of the ladies of Mr. Dallas's family lent an agreeable novelty to the ordinary dullness of routine on board a man-of-war.

Davis's journal is full of enthusiastic descriptions of travel in England, and the wonders of London, which he visited while the ship was at Southampton, traveling in what were almost the last days of that famous mode of conveyance, the English post chaise. While he was in London the king (William IV.) died, and he witnessed the ceremony of proclaiming the young queen at Saint James's and in the city. He took special delight in the opera, and, as he had a fine and discriminating taste in music, his criticisms are extremely

interesting and very graphic. The Italian opera reached the very summit of its existence at this time in London, and Davis is not the only critic who has grown enthusiastic in describing the opera in 1837. It is noticeable that the death of the king closed the theatres and places of amusement for only two or three nights, so that Davis had plenty of opportunity for this diversion. The greatest stars of the Italian<sup>lyric</sup> world were congregated in London, — Pasta (somewhat past her prime), Grisi, Lablache, Rubini, Tamburini, and the famous dancer, Taglioni.

After leaving England the ship went to Cronstadt. To quote from the journal: —

We were obliged to stop twenty-four hours at Copenhagen for a wind. Taking in two new pilots, one for the Grounds and another for the Baltic, we left there on the 23d (July). Going over the Grounds there was only 24 feet of water in a place of some extent. The ship, trimmed to an even keel, drew 22 feet 4 inches, so that we had but little to spare. The air was perfectly calm and the sea as smooth as glass; notwithstanding, she touched, by the awkwardness of the pilot, and the difficulty of steering with a steamboat very improperly ahead instead of alongside. . . . The shock was a slight one and hardly impeded the ship's way. When the shoal water was passed, the steamboat left us and we made sail. At the mouth of the Gulf of Finland we encountered a Russian fleet of nine sail of the line upon their regular summer tour of exercise. . . . On Sunday the 29th, at 3 o'clock in the morning, the ship anchored at Cronstadt.

At daylight our arrival was telegraphed to St. Petersburg, and at nine o'clock we were surprised by the intelligence that the Emperor intended to visit the ship in the course of the



morning. Owing to the fatigues of the previous night, and the state of some parts of the rigging that required immediate refitting, the people had not been called up at the usual early hour to clean the decks. They were not only not washed, but tar in use aloft had stained them, and they looked altogether worse than they had done at any time since fitting out. It could not certainly have been anticipated that His Imperial Majesty the Autocrat of all the Russias would resign his state and come on board a strange ship of war in the character of attendant to his own servants, without giving notice and allowing time for preparation. We were very much mortified at the condition of the vessel. We had hoped to show her off in a becoming state of beauty and order. As it was, we had only to make such hasty provision for His Majesty's reception as the time allowed. At about ten the Imperial steamboat emerged from the crowded neighborhood of the mole, and stood toward a Danish frigate that had arrived on the same morning. No standard or badge indicated the presence of the Emperor. From the Danish frigate she approached us. A boat crowded with uniforms left her. In the coxswain-box, filling the place and doing the duty of steersman, stood a noble figure in plain citizen's frock and white cap, who was designated by the American consul on board as the Emperor Nicholas. When the boat came alongside the suite passed over the gangway first and received the appropriate honors. His Majesty followed the very last, and turning directly forward, with a careless salute to the quarter-deck, he was lost in the intricacies of the ship. No one attended him. He looked at the forecastle and put some questions to the boatswain. I saw him next on the main-deck; he had chosen the side not usually shown to visitors, and was prying into whatever attracted him with searching curiosity. He made the same solitary, scrutinizing tour of the berth and orlop decks, including the officers' apartments. In the ward-room he spoke to the steward, and noticed Mrs.

Dallas's very beautiful baby with affectionate kindness. His intimate acquaintance with ships of war enabled him to pass through every part of the vessel with the same facility as an officer. Finally he appeared upon the poop-deck, leaning against the trysail mast in an attitude evidently studied to display his manly and symmetrical person. Here he remained during an examination of the percussion locks, and when it was over he went up to Count Nesselrode, raised his hand to his cap in the manner of an inferior officer reporting to a superior, and sprang hastily over the side. The suite followed. It consisted of Count Nesselrode and other civil officers of the government, and several of the most distinguished admirals. The incognito which the Emperor had chosen he was carefully permitted to retain. Excepting the

"Extraordinary gaze  
Such as is bent on sunlike majesty  
When it shines seldom in admiring eyes,"

which certainly might be excused to the wondering simplicity of republicans, he was troubled with no token of recognition, but quietly and unobserved suffered to pursue his own way as much as if his assumed unimportance had been real. We were afterwards told that, when he discovered that he had been known, he fully appreciated this delicacy. The officers of the Danish frigate were not aware of his presence until we manned yards on his return to the steamboat, hoisted the Russian flag at the main masthead, and announced it in a voice of thunder to the harbor by a salute of forty-one guns from our main-deck thirty-two pounders. The Emperor hoisted the American flag at the mainmast of the yacht, and returned the salute with an equal number of guns, and then, throwing off all further disguise, he unfurled the Imperial standard. The Danish frigate, the forts, and ten or fifteen Russian men-of-war, scattered in the spacious roadstead far and near, woke the echoes of the distant shores with mingling bursts of artillery.

It was the custom of the Emperor Nicholas to visit every foreign vessel of war in person, to learn from each such improvements in naval matters as might be adopted in his own navy, and the visit, as in this case, was generally made incognito. In this instance it was followed by an invitation to the officers, in the Emperor's name, to attend the private opera at Peterhoff on the following evening, and to look at the grounds. Davis, with others of the officers, accepted this invitation. The performance was a French vaudeville, and he naïvely remarks: "My chief amusement was to gaze about in this new scene. French vaudevilles I had seen before, but this was my first appearance, and I feared it would be my last, within the sacred precincts of an imperial court."

During the stay of the ship at Cronstadt the officers visited St. Petersburg, but there was nothing of special interest connected with this visit, and only one extract from the journal is worth preserving:—

We afterwards drove to the Admiralty, the headquarters of the navy. It is a low building of immense extent, perhaps six hundred feet, beautified in front by a row of trees. . . .

A long hall contains a large store of nautical and mathematical instruments, compasses, sextants, charts, etc., etc. They were carefully and systematically arranged, and indeed all we saw at the Admiralty confirmed the impression that everything relating to the department, both here and at Cronstadt, is conducted with perfect order and upon a fixed system. . . . The plan, I am inclined to think, extends itself throughout the active service of the navy, and embraces the minutest details, so that the daily and ordinary duties of a man-of-war, the practice (?) of evolutions and the precise

forms of discipline, are explicitly laid down. This particularity is in part a necessity, arising out of the forced and exotic nature of the navy. Despotism has determined to create a marine without the usual materials; therefore it wisely selects the most approved forms of practice in the best countries, and lays them down as instructions not to be violated. It provides a perfect uniformity, but represses genius. It is making bricks without straw, but making them in the best manner possible. This extreme minuteness was very much admired by some of the officers. It seems to me to be more becoming to the Russian navy than to our own. The former has no commerce as a school for seamen, and no naval genius, speaking with regard to the nation. It must educate everybody, the fore-castleman and the post-captain, and even go so far as to originate, if this were possible, the sentiments and predilections that belong to the service. The case is directly the reverse with us, who are preëminently a naval people. The scheme which best applies to us is that which, being thoroughly comprehensive, embraces heads and principles chiefly, and leaves the active details to be filled up by the governing mind, regulated by the custom which must be a universally required law of a practical and active service like our own. This is the English system; it is only necessary to refer to history for its success. It would be somewhat ridiculous to explain to an American commander how to sail his vessel, how to tack ship and reef topsails, etc. The commissioners for the revisal of the naval code lately attempted something of this kind, and terminated their labors by a thorough failure and disgrace. In another respect the Russian navy has a great advantage over us, in being controlled by a single and permanent will. With us the Secretary is constantly changing, and with him the orders and plans of the department. An indifference and want of zeal is a mournful consequence of this instability.

The writer did not survive to know that in less than sixty years the position would be reversed, and that his very language might be to-day the criticism of a Russian on the navy of the United States.

The *Independence* left Cronstadt on the 13th of August, and, after a boisterous and protracted passage of fourteen days, anchored at Copenhagen. Davis's journal might be quoted at length for an account of this very interesting visit to the Danish capital; but as his remarks are general rather than personal, they might be out of place and tedious in the present connection. The ship left Copenhagen on September 6th, and, encountering constant and heavy head winds, anchored at Spithead on the 20th. From here she sailed on the 29th for the coast of Brazil, touching at Madeira on the passage out. In leaving Spithead, the *Independence* had a trial of speed with H. B. M. frigate *Pique*, and, much to the mortification of the officers, was beaten; but she sailed from Madeira in company with another British ship, the *Wellesley*, seventy-four, flagship of the East India squadron, which had the reputation of being a good sailer, and the British admiral, tempted probably by the success of the *Pique*, offered a trial of speed. She was easily beaten by the *Independence*, and the next morning could be discerned far astern, only as a speck on the horizon. The *Pique* was a new ship, built after the design of a talented constructor, who added several very fast vessels to the British navy.

For the rest of the cruise of the *Independence* little need be said. The journal ends at Madeira. We

catch an occasional glimpse of the ship and her officers in contemporary letters. One officer,<sup>1</sup> a midshipman on board, wrote long after: "When we arrived at Rio de Janeiro, Lieutenant C. H. Davis, a fine sailor, and the officer whom the men most admired, had the deck. A moderate land breeze was blowing, and the entrance was narrow and dangerous, but the commodore determined to attempt the difficult feat of beating into port. Davis handled the ship beautifully, and the men sprang with alacrity at the sound of his voice. It was well that they were quick, for hardly would the sails be trimmed on one tack before the order, 'Ready, about!' would be given for the other. Shortly after getting through the narrow part of the entrance the sea breeze made, and, squaring our yards, we stood up to the anchorage, making a flying moor. This was indeed skillful seamanship, and excited the admiration of all the foreign sailors in port. Rarely had a vessel so large as the *Independence* accomplished this evolution. It was a lesson to the midshipmen that they never forgot."<sup>2</sup>

During a great part of this cruise the ship remained in the River Plate, protecting American interests in the state of war which existed between the Argentine Confederation and England, France, and Brazil. The famous Rosas was dictator, and Buenos Ayres was closely blockaded by a French fleet.

<sup>1</sup> The late Rear Admiral Thomas H. Stevens.

<sup>2</sup> This evolution was executed repeatedly on the same ground, though with a smaller ship, by the sloop of war *Portsmouth*, Commander A. A. Semmes, during two years in which the author served on board that vessel on the Brazil station. The *Portsmouth* also accomplished the somewhat more difficult feat of beating out of Rio against the sea breeze.

The ship fell in with the Wilkes Exploring Expedition here. Davis corresponded regularly with Peirce during this cruise, and the *Independence* returned to the United States and was paid off in April, 1840.

## CHAPTER V

### THE COAST SURVEY AND THE NAUTICAL ALMANAC

THE end of the cruise of the *Independence* marks the close of what may be considered as Davis's early career in the naval service. He had now been seventeen years in the navy and almost constantly at sea, when, by the operation of the system then in vogue, he might look forward to a long period of inactivity. The system, or want of system, in our naval organization, has been characterized by short periods of great acceleration, followed by long periods of stagnation in the flow of promotion. Davis entered the service just in time to suffer by the stagnation following the rapid promotions during the last war with Great Britain. Moreover, employment on shore for naval officers was an almost unknown thing ; at least, there was no regular shore duty for officers ; neither could an officer claim, of right, employment on shore. The first official recognition of shore duty as a legitimate employment was made in general orders in 1868, assigning a fixed period to sea service, to be followed by a similar period of shore duty, alternating with each other through an officer's whole active career, and marking in itself the first step in the decadence of the navy which followed



the civil war. In 1840 there were very few places for naval officers on shore, and those who had them were apt to hold on to them, as the principle of rotation was not recognized, so that a lieutenant, of eight or ten years' standing, at the end of a cruise found himself in a position to do pretty much whatever he pleased. His place on board ship was wanted by younger men, and promotion was still a long way ahead. With perhaps the exception of a cruise as first lieutenant, the professional prospect for years to come was one of forced inactivity. Under such circumstances, many active and intelligent officers turned their attention to the coast survey, which was now just beginning to advance from a position of insignificance to one of the greatest importance. When the *Independence* was paid off, Davis returned to Cambridge and resumed his mathematical studies with Peirce, and took his degree at Harvard. He served for a short time at the naval rendezvous in Boston, and in April, 1842, was appointed an assistant on the coast survey, and for a period of fifteen years he had very little connection with the active duties of the navy.

The United States Coast Survey<sup>1</sup> was first established by an act of Congress passed in 1807. At that time the only charts of our own coast were based upon foreign surveys, and many of them were foreign compilations. Upon the passage of the act above referred to,

<sup>1</sup> The article "Coast Survey," in the *American Cyclopædia*, and the reports of the superintendent are the authorities for this brief sketch of the survey.

the Secretary of the Treasury addressed letters to several scientific men, calling for plans as to the best methods of executing the survey. The plan proposed by Mr. Hassler was the one adopted. Hassler was a native of Switzerland, and had been employed in the trigonometrical survey of his own country. The fact that the plan for the United States Coast Survey should have originated with and been first executed by a foreigner gives a striking illustration of the lack of scientific knowledge in this country. Hassler was sent to Europe in 1811 for the purpose of procuring the necessary instruments and standards of measure, and, owing to the war with England, he was detained abroad, and did not get home until 1815. In 1817 he was formally appointed superintendent of the survey, and the labors in the field commenced by the measurement of a base line on the Hudson in the same year. Before he could publish the results of his first season's work, however, the survey was effectually discontinued by an act of Congress repealing that part of the law which authorized the employment of astronomers, and persons other than officers in the army and navy, in the prosecution of the work. From this time, for seventeen years, the survey languished, being carried on only spasmodically and without a definite, comprehensive plan, by officers of both services acting under their own departments and independently of each other. In 1828 the Secretary of the Navy again called the attention of Congress to the paramount necessity of a comprehensive survey of the coast in accordance with the plan of 1807. The increasing commerce of our ports made

this a vital and pressing necessity. Independent surveys made by naval officers had been carried on without definite plan, and with insufficient means both of time and money, and had resulted only in confusion. The results of these surveys were characterized by the Secretary of the Navy himself as "unsafe, and, in many instances, useless and pernicious." In reply to the question "whether, in the opinion of the department, such survey ought to be made," the Secretary replied: "Upon this point no doubt is entertained. It is called for by regard to our commercial and naval interests, and to our means of national defense." In 1832 the law of 1807 was revived, the employment of "astronomers and other persons" was again authorized, and Hassler once more submitted the same plan which had been adopted in 1816. In August of that year he was again appointed to the head of the survey, and this date marks the real beginning of the institution as it now exists. Hassler died in 1843. Some mistrust appears to have attached to his earlier work, for in the first years of the survey much time was lost in protracted congressional investigations, and in such methods of supervision and inspection as Hassler resented as insulting to himself. He had given the whole prime of his life to a patient effort to establish and sustain the survey, and the methods of primary and secondary triangulation proposed in his original plan are substantially the same as those employed at the present day. Hassler was succeeded by Professor A. D. Bache, who remained at the head of the survey for twenty-three years, and brought to the work great scientific expe-

rience and ability. Under Bache the scope of the survey was extended to nearly its present proportions, for he recognized the far-reaching requirements of the plan, and systemized the work to embrace the whole range of related practical sciences. Astronomy, geodesy, mathematics, geology, natural history, and the physical sciences of electricity and photography, as well as the mechanical arts necessary in supplying instruments, — all these are related either directly or indirectly to the practical work of the survey, and go hand in hand with topography, hydrography, drawing, engraving, and printing, in the formation of charts for the use of navigators, and in the compilation of sailing directions. Professor Bache was succeeded in 1867 by Professor Benjamin Peirce, who further extended the survey to include the triangulation of the continent, so that the institution became the Coast and Geodetic Survey of the United States.

At the beginning of the active life of the coast survey in 1832, science in America may be said to have been almost non-existent. That it should have been necessary to go abroad to find a superintendent for the work is a sufficient evidence of the truth of this assertion. American science was unknown abroad. The lives of the pioneers of scientific work in this country show early struggles against public indifference and obstacles which were almost insurmountable. The coast survey was the first of the great scientific departments of the government, and, with the Smithsonian Institution, it did more to foster the growth of knowledge and stimulate research than any other gov-

ernment establishment has ever done before or since. The workers in the field of science were a mere handful. Under the fostering care of the scientific establishments in various departments of the government, they have multiplied to a throng; and to the coast survey itself belongs the honor of the beginning. Speaking on this subject, a writer on the history of the Smithsonian Institution<sup>1</sup> for the first half century of its existence says: "The history of the Smithsonian Institution is practically coextensive with the history of the Naval Observatory, organized in 1842, and with that of the Coast and Geodetic Survey, as reorganized in 1843. . . . The interest taken by Joseph Henry in the progress of the more abstruse mathematical theories of astronomy and geodesy forms a noteworthy feature of his annual reports. These reports show that the Institution was in touch with the ablest mathematicians of the country, and that no branch of their science was so abstract as to be beyond the recognition and aid of the Secretary. It seems strange, in the present day of open avenues to the publication of meritorious works, that at a time less than fifty years ago there should have been difficulty in finding a publisher for so great a treatise as Professor Benjamin Peirce's 'Analytical Mechanics.' Still more strange does it appear that the coöperation of the Smithsonian Institution with the Navy Department should have been essential to secure the publication of so important a work as Davis's translation of Gauss's

<sup>1</sup> *The Smithsonian Institution, 1846-1896*, edited by George Brown Goode, article "Mathematics," by Robert Simpson Woodward.

‘*Theoria Motus Corporum Cœlestium.*’<sup>1</sup> But publishers in those days found little demand for, and less profit in, contributions to knowledge. Science as such had not yet been recognized by the colleges, and there were only a few men, mostly in the Eastern States, who found in their surroundings any encouragement to their devotion to abstract studies. Even the government bureaus, like the Naval Observatory, the ‘Nautical Almanac’ Office, and the Coast and Geodetic [*sic*] Survey, had not yet reached an independent footing in regard to the publication of researches indispensable to the progress of their work.”

When Davis joined the coast survey as an assistant, the work so far accomplished included only New York Bay and the neighboring shores of Long Island and New Jersey. In the reorganization of the work in 1843, the whole coast was divided into sections which were placed in charge of separate parties, and the hydrography of harbors and offshore work was intrusted to naval officers. It would be tedious to recite, in chronological detail, the events of Davis’s life during the seven years in which he remained attached to the survey. From April, 1842, to July, 1849, he was almost constantly employed on this service, the interruptions being unimportant and infrequent. His first work was an investigation of the velocity and direction of the tides in New York harbor and Long Island Sound, and the study of the current of the Gulf

<sup>1</sup> The translation of the *Theoria Motus* was made while Davis was at the head of the *Nautical Almanac*, and published while he was at sea, in 1857.

Stream and the tides and currents of the Nantucket Shoals. His work in this connection led to his frequent employment on commissions to examine the principal harbors; and he served, not only at this time but subsequently, as a permanent member of several harbor commissions both at the North and South. He also made a special study of the tides in Hell Gate, and prepared a plan for deepening the channel and removing obstructions, for which, in 1848, he received the thanks of the New York Chamber of Commerce. These labors led to a general study of the laws of tidal action, in which he made valuable additions to knowledge, and was led to the adoption of original and striking views, which are embodied in his "Memoir upon the Geological Action of the Tidal and Other Currents of the Ocean,"<sup>1</sup> and in his "Law of Deposit of the Flood Tide."<sup>2</sup> These publications made his name known as a scientific investigator and an hydrographer of skill; and their object was to exhibit the law of relation between the tidal currents of the sea and the alluvial deposits on its borders, showing that this law had contributed in past ages, and is still operating, to affect the growth of continents and the modification of their forms. He also undertook a general discussion of the tidal observations of the whole survey, and, working with Hampton Roads as a base, carried on the discussions to include the effects of the moon's parallax and declination, eliminating which the fluctuations caused by atmospheric changes appear as residual

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs American Academy*, New Series, vol. iv.

<sup>2</sup> *Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge*, vol. iii.

errors. This work was performed under the direct supervision of the superintendent himself, who says: <sup>1</sup> "The effect of changes of pressure and of winds upon the curve of height is already apparent. While the accumulation of these observations enables us to proceed in the successive steps of their complete discussion towards a prediction tide-table, the new observations under the immediate direction of Lieutenant-Commandant Davis are made to pass through the previous stages of reduction. I have also availed myself of Lieutenant-Commandant Davis's personal labors to make a preliminary discussion of the tide wave in Long Island Sound."

In 1844, on the reorganization of the survey under Professor Bache, Davis was placed in charge of the hydrography of the eastern section, from Passamaquoddy Bay to Point Judith, embracing the coasts of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Besides the survey of several harbors, the principal one of which was Boston, Davis's work on this section was almost entirely on the Nantucket Shoals. It seems extraordinary to realize that until fifty years ago these shoals had never been surveyed, and that the position of the principal dangers in the usual track of vessels was laid down on the chart on the report of fishermen, traders, and coast pilots, while other shoals, still more dangerous because their existence was not even suspected, had never been reported, and were consequently uncharted. The almost immediate result of a systematic survey was the discovery of the New South Shoal, which for many years bore

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Superintendent*, November, 1847.



Davis's name. This discovery called forth letters of acknowledgment from the boards of underwriters of Boston and New York, and Davis himself says of it: "Many good ships, never heard of, have been wrecked here, and their scattered remains, carried to sea by the currents, have sunk there and afforded no clue to their loss. The *President*, steam packet, it will be recollected, was seen hereabouts for the last time." Now this shoal is marked by the South Shoal Light-ship, which lies farther off shore than any light-ship on the coast. The work on Nantucket Shoals continued from season to season as long as Davis remained on the survey, and the whole extent of the shoals was accurately surveyed. Many new dangers were discovered and laid down, and a study made of the set of the tides and currents.

While engaged in the investigation of the current of the Gulf Stream, Davis commanded the brig *Washington*, and for the offshore work on Nantucket Shoals and the hydrography of the eastern section he commanded successively the schooner *Gallatin* and the steamer *Bibb*. Hydrographic surveying was carried on only in the summer season, but the winters were occupied in reducing observations, and particularly in the work on the tides and Hell Gate; and there were frequent journeys along the coast as far south as Florida, in company with the superintendent, and in connection with the several harbor commissions, of which they were both members; and to Washington for consultations at the Coast Survey Office. In this way an intimacy sprung up between Bache and Davis which lasted

until the former's death in 1867. In his frequent visits to Washington he generally stayed with Bache at the Coast Survey Office, or with Henry at the Smithsonian Institution, with whom his scientific work had also brought him into close intimacy. Davis was one of the trusted and responsible officers of the survey, and in fact, during the latter part of his connection with the survey, he was almost constantly in consultation with the superintendent on matters relating not only to the internal policy of the work, but in defending and supporting the institution in its relations with Congress ; for, like other new undertakings, it was misunderstood, and was more than once made the object of attack. On one of these occasions Davis was brought into close relations with Jefferson Davis, who had undertaken the defense of the coast survey in the Senate. Davis's connection with the survey ceased in 1849, and although in no way required, either by custom or by official courtesy, the superintendent wrote to the secretary of the treasury : "The official reports of the progress of the coast survey have, from time to time, brought the name of Lieutenant Davis very prominently before the department, as marked by all the qualities which insure distinction in such a work. The loss of his services will be deeply felt. The zeal, industry, knowledge, and judgment, ripened by experience, which he has brought to the survey, cannot soon be replaced. They have conferred upon it some of its most decided claims to usefulness and public approval." The hydrography of the coast survey has been carried on by naval officers since the beginning,

and many have been connected with the survey, first and last; but the work has now taken on something of a routine character, while it was Davis's good fortune to enter the service of the survey when there was still a wide field open for original investigation and discovery, and when the number of original scientific workers in the whole country was comparatively small. His real talents were developed in a perfectly wholesome and congenial atmosphere.

About this time several young German officers were in the navy of the United States, serving on board our ships for the purpose of learning their profession; for the kingdom of Prussia was beginning a naval policy, and like Russia in 1837, having no naval material at home, was studying the best naval methods abroad. The choice of the United States navy as a model was natural enough, as our ships and service had a very high reputation for efficiency, and our country was the one great power having no interests in the continental politics of Europe. A Prussian commissioner was in Washington to study naval organization, and with powers to propose to the Navy Department the selection of an American officer to take charge of the organization of the Prussian navy. Davis was named by Commodore M. C. Perry, to whom the question had been referred, as the officer best qualified for this appointment. But the negotiation, if indeed it ever amounted to so much, fell through. Davis certainly never sought the place, and stood in a perfectly passive attitude, and it is only mentioned in his letters from Washington in the spring of 1849 as a sugges-

tion of Commodore Perry's. Indeed, Davis's heart was in his scientific work, in which he had become thoroughly engrossed.

The question of a national prime meridian was a long vexed one, which was only finally settled by legislation in 1855. Seamen generally favored adhesion to the meridian of Greenwich, to which they were accustomed, and to which their charts, and for many years thereafter the charts which they used abroad, referred. But the work of the coast survey had brought out very clearly the necessity for a national ephemeris, which should take the place of and improve upon the "British Nautical Almanac;" and Davis threw the whole weight of his influence and energy into the accomplishment of this purpose. He was seconded by Bache and Henry, and by Maury, the superintendent of the Naval Observatory. The result of their labors was the establishment in July, 1849, of the "American Ephemeris and Nautical Almanac," and Davis was placed in charge of the work, and, by a wise provision of the department, left absolutely unfettered in its execution. Perhaps no one achievement of his life has entitled him to higher fame, or has left a more lasting impression. The author of the "Biographical Memoir" for the American Academy<sup>1</sup> says of the Almanac: "The establishment of this work was urged by its projectors, and especially by Lieutenant Davis (the prime mover in the undertaking), with two motives: first, to advance the scientific character and standing of the country by a publication of the highest order from a

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. xii.

scientific point of view ; and, secondly, to promote the cause of astronomy itself, and render substantial services to navigation by producing a work on a higher plane than the 'British Nautical Almanac,' fully conformed to the latest developments of knowledge, and likely to give an additional stimulus to pure research. To carry out this ambitious plan, with the revision of the solar, lunar, and planetary tables, and of various points of astronomical theory which it involved, it was necessary to enlist in the work the ablest mathematical astronomers of the country, and at the same time to train up a body of young computers, and to inspire them not only with the spirit of numerical accuracy, but with the true love of science and desire to advance it. To this arduous but most interesting task Davis brought his admirable judgment and his fine scientific talents, together with that fortunate temperament which easily united various men in loyalty to one enterprise, and that generosity of nature which thought only of doing the work in the best manner, and gladly gave the freest possible play to others' individuality. The first volume of the 'Ephemeris' appeared in 1852, and was very favorably received on both sides of the Atlantic ; and it may be safely said that, except the coast survey, of which the vast scope of course gives it pre-eminence, no scientific work which has been carried on in this country has redounded more largely to the national credit. 'The policy adopted in the newly formed office,' writes one who was familiar with it and whose judgment is authoritative, 'though not in all respects to be permanently imitated as a piece of

administrative machinery, was such as to make it a more efficient promoter of mathematical astronomy in this country than any organization we have ever had. Young men of talent were looked for from all quarters, were employed without regard to personal or political influence, were paid according to their efficiency, and were encouraged to engage in any branch of mathematical or astronomical research which would tend to improve the Almanac. In the work of the office there was a freedom from discipline and restraint, which, though it might work badly under other circumstances, was very favorable to the development of a school of mathematicians. Besides men like Peirce and Walker,<sup>1</sup> who had attained eminence before becoming connected with the office, the names of President Runkle, Professors Winlock and Newcomb, Chauncey Wright, and William Ferrel may be cited as representatives of the men who were first brought out through their connection with the Nautical Almanac.’ ”

Those who engage in useful scientific pursuits, and particularly those who follow astronomy and the exact sciences, need have no misgivings as to fame. Not in the lifetime of the laborer perhaps, but sooner or later, honor comes; for their works are embalmed in the chronicles of exact truth. Speaking of the precise measurements of practical astronomy, Sir John Herschel says :<sup>2</sup> “ The brazen circle with which that useful work was done may moulder, the marble pillar totter on its base, and the astronomer himself survive only

<sup>1</sup> Sears C. Walker.

<sup>2</sup> *Introduction to the B. A. C.*, ed. 1845, p. 5.

in the gratitude of his posterity ; but the record remains, and transfuses all its own exactness into every determination which takes it for a groundwork." The "Nautical Almanac" stands a monument to Davis's scientific skill, more enduring than brass or marble.

The "Nautical Almanac" office was established in Cambridge, for the advantages which could only be derived from the proximity of the University, in the immediate availability of mathematical talent, as well as for the benefits of the library, which had been enriched by Nathaniel Bowditch, and his own private library, which was still accessible to students. The theoretical department of the work was placed under the special direction of Professor Peirce, and most of the calculations passed under his final revision. During the years of Davis's connection with the coast survey and "Nautical Almanac," Cambridge continued to be his abode. He married, in 1842, Harriette Blake, the youngest daughter of the Hon. Elijah Hunt Mills, of Northampton, some time United States senator from Massachusetts. Mr. Mills died in 1829, in the prime of life, but his widow survived to extreme old age, a woman of distinguished personality and most charming character, who made her home in Cambridge, living sometimes with one married daughter and sometimes with the other. The older Miss Mills had married Benjamin Peirce. In 1846 Davis built a house on Quincy Street, between Cambridge Street and Broadway, which is now the property of the University. At that time Quincy Street was a new street, and it was not accepted by the city until 1852. It was on the very outskirts of

Cambridge, though it formed one boundary of the College Yard. Beyond it, to the eastward, the meadows stretched in unbroken undulations to East Cambridge and the marshes, and there were almost no houses between Davis's and East Cambridge. From his eastern windows the dome of the State House and Castle William, in the harbor, were conspicuous objects. Settlement in Cambridge had clustered along the lines of Kirkland Street, Brattle Street, Garden Street, Mason Street, and about the College Yard and Common. Cambridgeport, a suburb between Cambridge and the West Boston bridge, lay along Main and Harvard streets eastward from Dana Hill. Broadway was a country lane, and Cambridge Street, as its name implied, led to East Cambridge and the Court House and to Craigie's bridge. Westward of the terminus of Brattle Street was the beautiful country about Mount Auburn, Arlington, and Fresh Pond, along which stretched the Concord Turnpike. The river, most picturesque at Watertown, was bordered at Cambridge by broad tide-marshes, dotted with big ricks of marsh hay propped up on high spiles; and in winter the river was often frozen over solid, and smelt was taken through holes cut in the ice. The river was crossed at Cambridge by the Brighton bridge, and at Cambridgeport by the Brookline bridge, leading to Brookline, Jamaica Pond, and West Roxbury, where Mr. Minot, Davis's brother-in-law, and his sons, — who were almost Davis's contemporaries in age, — had established themselves in a beautiful country place of considerable extent. The Sunday drives to West Roxbury were a constant source



of pleasure in the simple and busy life at Cambridge. The College Yard, as it was always familiarly called, was the centre round which the town of Cambridge clustered; and if it was wanting in architectural pretension, the old buildings in their quiet dignity of age, the broad lawns, and the ancient elms in which the whole College was embowered, gave a character to the place which it has since lost. Diagonally opposite from Davis's house was the Delta, — now occupied by Memorial Hall, — on which the college games were celebrated. Cambridge was a remote suburb of Boston, which was only to be reached by private conveyance or by the “hourly,” an omnibus of magnificent proportions which plied between Harvard Square and Brattle Street in Boston. During the summers, until 1849, the offshore work in the Gulf Stream and on the Nantucket Shoals kept Davis constantly away from home; and after the establishment of the Almanac, and the more settled life which that work entailed, there were still frequent excursions down the bay with the Boston pilots, on duties connected with the Harbor Commission, and occasional journeys on similar business to New York, Philadelphia, Washington, and the South.

Peirce lived on the opposite side of Quincy Street, in a house which has since been removed to give place to Sever Hall, and the two households dwelt almost as one. There was the freedom and intimacy of intellectual distinction in the social life of Cambridge at this time, but it is not for the present writer to depict it. Abler pens than his have pictured a

social condition Arcadian in its simplicity and almost unique of its kind ; and merely to enumerate Davis's neighbors, friends, and associates in Cambridge would be to call the roll of names which belong to the front rank in the intellectual life of the country.

Amidst such congenial surroundings and in such peaceful scenes as these the happiest years of a useful life were passed, while the clouds of war were gathering, and the shadows of an irrepressible conflict were darkening over the land. But it must not be inferred that his social and domestic happiness and the engrossing interest of his work obscured in Davis's mind a realization of the political condition of the country. The whole intellect of the North watched with keen anxiety the development of political events. The temper in which it watched was misunderstood. The North was very patient and very earnest for the Union, and there still existed the deepest veneration for the great names which the South had given to history. In March, 1852, and for the first time in his life, Davis was in Richmond with Maury, on his way to a meeting of the Harbor Commission at Charleston, and he wrote: "I find that my mind is stirred with strong emotions of patriotism by being for the first time in the capital of Virginia. Whilst the aspect of everything is new, the place recalls numberless exciting and deep-rooted recollections and associations familiar as household words, the very treasures of memory and the pride of thought. Richmond brings up the remembrance of Henry, Washington the godlike, Jefferson, Madison, and of Marshall and Wirt. 'My heart is

stirred' (not 'idly') when I consider the things done in past times by these heroes of my own — yes, still, thank God! *my own* country. They shall ever be 'freshly remembered.' Our children shall be taught to imitate them, and thus they will be made virtuous and useful; and if virtuous and useful, then happy."

## CHAPTER VI

### COMMANDER — VARIOUS DUTIES — THE SAINT MARY'S

IN 1853 Davis served with his friend Du Pont as superintendent of the Crystal Palace Exhibition in New York. He passed the whole summer and autumn in this work, and did a great deal towards saving that mismanaged enterprise from failure. In recognition of the value of his labors he received a handsome service of plate, but he got very little else, except vexation, from it. In 1854, after thirty-one years' service and twenty-three years in the grade of lieutenant, he was promoted and received his commander's commission, and in 1855 he served as a member of the board of visitors at the Naval Academy at Annapolis.

It must not be supposed from anything in the preceding pages that Davis was himself opposed to a naval school as such. On the contrary, he had consistently advocated its establishment. He was one of the officers consulted in 1845 on the foundation of the Academy, and in 1837, on the occasion of the visit of the *Independence* to Copenhagen, he had examined and described the Danish naval school. He says: "At the presentation (to King Frederick VI. of Denmark), the subjects of conversation were chiefly professional. His Majesty asked Mr. Slidell some question concerning our

Naval Academy ; and when he was informed that we had none, he exclaimed with great surprise, 'Cela m'étonne !' And it certainly is a matter of reasonable surprise that while the instructions of every commander require of him the performance of duties that suppose a liberal and general education, yet no adequate provision is made for securing the requisite degree of knowledge and capacity. Men are properly trained by early discipline to qualify them for all other important offices, or else their ability is fairly tested by public competition. But in the navy, on the contrary, individuals are left entirely to their own unassisted energies to contend against want of means and opportunities, to overcome obstacles that may well damp common ardor, or yield to the insidious promptings of indolence. They must study, if they study at all, without system and without teachers, or hitch along from necessity to necessity. Still, it is universally conceded that the navy is the most important arm of our national defense." Like most self-educated men, Davis had an intense appreciation of the advantages of systematic training. He admired in the Danish naval school the judicious combination of the practical with the academical courses of instruction, but he probably, and naturally, failed to appreciate the enormous advantages which were derived from early responsibility, and from a system which forced incompetent men, if not wholly out of service, at least into obscurity and inactivity ; for in his day the conspicuous leaders of the naval profession were as distinctly marked as are those of the bar or medicine. He worked earnestly for our own

school, and in his address to the graduating class in 1855 he said: "Your advantages of education have been infinitely superior to anything enjoyed by the generation of officers which precedes you. We do not envy you your greater good fortune. Quite otherwise: we congratulate you upon it. We congratulate ourselves that the period of darkness, in which it was thought that refinement and cultivation were incompatible with the professional duties of a sea-officer, has utterly passed away." In 1845 the course at the naval school was fixed at five years, of which three years consecutively were passed afloat, and in 1851 the system was changed to a four years' course at the school, followed by service at sea; but still the course was decidedly practical,<sup>1</sup> and it is doubtful whether the most ardent advocate of early education in the old navy would have favored a system which makes a young officer familiar with the chemical properties of steel and the abstruse theories of magnetism, but leaves him in practical ignorance of how to steer a ship, or take soundings, or handle a boat in a sea-way or strong tide.

<sup>1</sup> The word is used with the utmost deference to Captain Mahan (see the address at the opening of the War College in 1892). Conceding the full force of Captain Mahan's argument, it is submitted that theory becomes good practice only at the hands of the experienced practitioner. In fact, it is presumed that that is exactly what Captain Mahan means. To extend his argument in support of a purely academic training of naval officers is a *reductio ad absurdum*. Taking Captain Mahan's own illustration, could Bonaparte have planned and executed the Marengo campaign if he had never seen an army in the field? On the field of Austerlitz the Emperor saw and seized upon a false movement on the part of the enemy, and turned it to his own instant advantage. Could he have done this if his "practice" had been confined exclusively to the closet?

The Academy in 1855 was in close touch with the service, and the service at large felt that the school was its own, and working for its own best interests. The yearly boards of visitors were composed, as of course they should always be, entirely of naval officers of high rank, selected for their standing in the service, which was still an acknowledged quality. The office was no sinecure, as it involved a minute and laborious examination of the school and its policy, guided by technical professional knowledge. Davis was chosen to deliver the address to the graduating class. The address is a model of sound advice and professional wisdom, without a trace of pedantry or affectation. It was printed at the joint request of the academic board and the graduating class, and several members of the latter have preserved it to this day, and it is not too much to say that it has, to some slight extent perhaps, influenced the course of their lives. It might command a larger share of the listener's attention than the commonplace platitudes of a political orator, when the speaker could say: "But if to witness the first scene of the entrance into life of young men of ambition and education always excites pleasurable emotions, even in the general spectator, how much more must we feel with regard to you, — we who are united to you by the ties of a common profession, which bind us together like the ties of marriage, indissoluble but by death!" The experience of this duty was a delightful one to Davis, and he wrote: "It has been very satisfactory to me, on this account (among other reasons), that I have been so long out of the navy and its society and associations

that I might, not unreasonably, be thought to have lost some of the spirit of the profession and some of my knowledge of its wants and character. It reunites me with the service, from which the pursuits of science seemed to have separated me. I have had some very flattering things said to me by the officers. . . . The great harmony, cordiality, and good feeling which have prevailed throughout have produced a decided feeling of personal attachment among the members of the board, and they give quite a tender character to our parting. It was the renewal of my long-suspended intercourse with my brother officers which, you know, rendered this duty particularly agreeable to me. And I have derived from the contact more pleasure, and more advantage, than I expected even. I feel as if I had been rejuvenated with regard to the service. I shall have a great deal to tell you about this. I feel and think much more about it than I can possibly put on paper. . . . I am writing with one of those long-handled steel pens of Bache's, which it requires the skill of a mountebank to balance."

During this year and the following, Davis was constantly away from home, on duties with the Harbor Commission at New York, of which he was a permanent member, and in frequent consultations with Bache in Washington, and with Henry, Maury, General Totten (the chief of engineers), with all of whom he was associated on boards and commissions relating to similar matters. He also elaborated his plan for the improvement of Hell Gate, which was adopted by the commissioners, and for which he received, as has been noted,



the thanks of the New York Chamber of Commerce. In fact, he was an exceedingly busy man. His scientific reputation was an established fact, and his services were in constant demand. But there was another subject in which his interest was equally engrossed, namely, naval reform, and the retiring board of 1855. He was not a member of the board, but he was summoned to Washington to meet Du Pont, who bore nearly the whole brunt of the odium which the board suffered as a consequence of its action, and together they managed the defense in the bitter attacks which were directed against the board, and against Du Pont especially, in Congress. In this connection he writes: "March 10, 1856. Yesterday, after dinner, I came up to Du Pont's, who lives in this part of the city, and I remained with him till half past ten o'clock. We fought over all the battles of the navy. He had a great deal to tell me, and I had something to tell him. If you are worried now by the little difficulties I have to contend with, and those not personal, I don't know what you would do if I were in Du Pont's situation. The feeling against the board is, I may almost say, *concentrated* upon him. He sustains himself perfectly, wonderfully. I have never had more cause to admire his courage and strength of character than now, when he is beset with enemies and difficulties. He has numerous friends, however, and some good ones."

In November, 1856, Davis was offered a command at sea, which of course he accepted, as he wrote: "When the secretary offered me a command yesterday, it was an alternative; the other choice was to give

up all desire for a command, and to resign the active service." He might have remained indefinitely at the head of the "Nautical Almanac," as Maury remained indefinitely at the Observatory; but he could not contemplate a situation which obliged him to forego all hope of promotion, and resign the active life of the profession. He had fully expected a command since his promotion. He was therefore appointed to the *Saint Mary's*, sloop of war, on the Pacific station, his old cruising ground. He sailed from New York in the steam frigate *Wabash*, carrying out the relief officers and crew for the *Saint Mary's* at Panama, crossed the isthmus with his men by the newly constructed Panama Railroad, and took command of his ship on December 16th. For the next two years he cruised in the Pacific. The *Saint Mary's* visited several ports on the West Coast of South America, the Marquesas and Sandwich Islands, and surveyed several uninhabited islands in the South Pacific. Davis took formal possession of New Nantucket and Jarvis islands, the principal object for the survey and occupation of these islands being the guano deposits, which turned out to be of no great commercial value, although they were operated by the American Guano Company.

In 1855 William Walker,<sup>1</sup> a native of Tennessee, and an adventurer by profession, had landed in Nicaragua with a handful of followers, for the ostensible purpose of affording military assistance to the democratic party in the intestine disturbances which were agitating that republic. His real purpose was the

<sup>1</sup> See *American Cyclopædia*, article "Walker."

extension of the slave power of the United States, and the opening up of new and promising fields for American slave labor and a new market for American slaves. He was a fearless and, to a certain extent, an able man, and at first his success was phenomenal. After a series of adventures, in which he won several battles for the democratic cause, he became generalissimo, then president, and finally dictator, of Nicaragua. He was now apparently secure in the possession of power, but his first step toward the accomplishment of his real object was a mistake, and sealed the destruction of his own fortunes. He began by revoking the charter of the Vanderbilt Company, by which the route of transit through Lake Nicaragua was managed. His intention was, probably, to remove Northern influence from the country, but he miscalculated the result of antagonizing the money power of the North. When he followed up this act by revoking the decree prohibiting slavery in the dominions of the republic, which had been in force for thirty-two years, violent insurrections broke out, which were seconded by other Central American States, and stimulated by agents of the Vanderbilt Company, who furnished arms and money. An alliance was formed against Walker, an allied army took the field, and Walker soon found himself in a very precarious situation and fast losing ground, with dwindling forces and a failing cause. In the spring of 1857 Davis was sent to San Juan del Sur with the *Saint Mary's*, to watch events. By this time Walker was reduced to desperate straits. He was besieged in Rivas, and his total destruction was only a question of time.

Davis acted entirely on his own responsibility, for he had received no orders or instructions either from the commodore on the station or from the government at home. He also acted strictly in the interests of humanity, for he knew perfectly well that Walker deserved his fate, but he could not lie still in the *Saint Mary's* at San Juan del Sur and see American citizens butchered in cold blood within reach of his arm, no matter how criminal or misguided they might be. He went to Rivas, taking with him only the surgeon of the ship as aid and secretary, and, by the exercise of judicious pressure on the allied chiefs, he raised the siege of Rivas and received the surrender of Walker, with sixteen of his principal officers and about three hundred and fifty men, all Americans, under their pledge to leave the country, for which he became surety. He also took possession of the schooner *Granada*, at San Juan del Sur, which Walker had seized, and in which he had hoped to effect his escape, and turned her over to the authorities of Nicaragua. He received Walker and his army on board the *Saint Mary's*, and transported them to Panama, whence he sent them home to the United States. Davis was assailed in Congress for his conduct of this affair, but the leaders of the slave party had sense enough to know that his action was strictly justifiable from every point of view, and the question was allowed to drop. Walker had no scruple in violating his pledge, and within the year he landed again in Nicaragua, on the Atlantic coast, but was intercepted and arrested by Commodore Paulding, Davis's old shipmate of the *Dolphin*, who commanded

on that station, and sent again to the United States. In 1860 he made a similar attempt to invade the republic of Honduras, which was a complete fiasco. He was overpowered by the native troops, taken a prisoner to Truxillo, and shot in the public square. The Walker episode was a trivial enough event as far as Davis was concerned, but it served to bring out the conspicuous traits of his official character, — promptness, and soundness of judgment, and fearlessness of responsibility. It marked him as a man who could be depended upon in an emergency.

Of course, on his return to the United States, Walker sought to betray his deliverer by loudly proclaiming that Davis had *forced* him to surrender at Rivas by throwing the weight of his authority with the allied commanders, when his (Walker's) chances of ultimate success were still good. The fact is, Davis saved Walker's life, and the lives of his officers and army; for that there would have been a general massacre at Rivas, following capitulation, no person conversant with the situation and the character of the people engaged ever doubted. It was admitted by several of Walker's own officers. Davis himself wrote from Mare Island, in March, 1858: "Among the things which I put down to mention to you, is my having received numerous calls from officers of the army in San Francisco and here. The officers who called here came from the barracks at Benicia, seven miles distant. They all spoke of the affair at Rivas, and adopted the view that I saved Walker and his people from the terrible fate of Colonel Crabbe and his party in Mex-

ico. It was apparently the object of their call to express their approval of my course, and sympathy with me in relation to Walker's attacks. General Sanders sent me a note, of which the inclosed is a copy. [The note was extremely flattering.] He was the third in command at Rivas. General Frey, by far the most respectable American officer Walker ever had with him in character and talents, and a very pleasant gentleman, called with a party of friends to pay his respects and offer his thanks and congratulations. He was not in Rivas at the time of the capitulation. You will be gratified to hear this. The right view of my conduct seems to have been taken in San Francisco. I was amused and shocked to see Henningsen's<sup>1</sup> last letter. I have very often said among my friends that the falsehood and utter want of principle of these people would, sooner or later, lead them into some acts which would bring them to confusion. . . . I have no feeling now on the subject, but I shall never cease to wonder at the delusion of the South in accepting Walker's assertion that I *forced* him to leave Rivas. I will dismiss the subject by saying (what I very possibly may have said before) that I have one feeling paramount to all others, and that is gratitude that I was relieved from the horror of witnessing the slaughter of my countrymen, as it occurred in Havana and in Lower California, without the ability to succor them. This would have been a calamity as enduring as my life. I thank God that He permitted me to escape that."

The *Saint Mary's* went to Mare Island in March,

<sup>1</sup> He was one of Walker's principal officers.

1858, to refit, and did not get away again until the middle of August. The delay was caused at first by lack of funds at the yard for the repairs, and then by the excitement attending the discovery of gold at Thomson's and Frazer's rivers, followed by a general exodus of the mechanics of the yard and the desertion of a large number of seamen from the *Saint Mary's* crew. During this long period, while the *Saint Mary's* was under the sheers, Davis lived on board the *Independence*, which was stationary receiving ship. Farragut was in command at the station, and the intercourse between the two was constant and intimate. A few extracts from Davis's letters from the Mare Island navy yard may show the manner of the man, and bring the short chapter of the cruise of the *Saint Mary's* to a close : —

March 26th. Several of my officers are very much attached to me, and very extravagant in their way of speaking of me to others, the effect of which I sometimes see in their manners. This is much more agreeable than if it were the other way, still I am ready to exclaim, "Save me from my friends!" Such unmeaning praises go but little way with discriminating people. "Now you will come into court and swear that I have a poor pennyworth in the" German, but they say I speak it fluently. The purity and distinctness with which the French admiral speaks his native language is remarked upon by his countrymen : now I hear that I speak French as well as Admiral Lugeol. Such compliments make one blush not only with shame, but with a sense of guiltiness.

May 17th. I have had my young midgy (my only youngster) out in a little schooner a week, dredging and dragging the net, in Mare Island Straits, San Pablo Bay, and San

Francisco Bay, to get something for Agassiz ; I am sorry to say, not with the success I anticipated. The amount of animal life in the water is nothing like that on our shores and in our bays. The whole physical geography of these coasts is essentially different from ours. This I need not tell him. But I wish you would tell him that I have brought from Honolulu a crustacea for him, presented by the Agricultural Society of the Hawaiian Islands at my solicitation. When he sees it he will say, " Oh, Davis ! Davis ! " pronouncing the *a* like the French *è* with the grave accent, and the *i* like our long *e*. . . .

Have I spoken to you in a previous letter of the life of Admiral Sir Edward Parry ? You will be deeply interested in it. It is a principle of my life to cultivate indifference towards and independence of individual opinions. I study to be regardless of what others think of my profession<sup>1</sup> and myself. If it were not so, I would recommend this book to the notice of some persons who think a life in the navy incompatible with and irreconcilable to all moral goodness. Sir Edward Parry had what the Catholics call a vocation. His *call* would have made him distinguished in any sphere of life. How much he resembles Havelock !

June 18th. I have delivered Mr. Folsom's message to Captain Farragut : the latter had often spoken to me of the former, and always in terms of gratitude and affection. He was very glad to hear from Mr. Folsom,<sup>2</sup> and begged me to say to him everything that was kind. He had never forgotten his obligations to him, and never would forget them. He

<sup>1</sup> There existed in Davis's time, and exists still probably, in the East, and especially in Boston, a prejudice against the military and naval professions amounting almost to a social stigma. Yet, curiously enough, the people themselves are not wholly exempt from the national weakness which exalts in questionable military titles.

<sup>2</sup> See Mahan's *Life of Admiral Farragut*, pp. 57 *et seq.* Rev. Charles Folsom, formerly a chaplain in the navy and Farragut's preceptor in youth, was a near neighbor of Davis's in Cambridge.



said further that he had written Mr. Folsom repeatedly, and was sorry not to have received an answer. Tell Mr. Folsom he may well be proud of his pupil. He is one of the cleverest men in the navy, in both the English and American senses of the word.

July 1-4. Our navy yard was thrown into a state of excitement by the arrival of the intelligence of Captain Farragut's removal, by the last mail. He has been here four years, and when he came the island was a desert of which no sod had been upturned. He is identified with all the buildings and improvements here. He is personally popular, his temper is amiable, his sentiments just, his feelings good, and his manners frank though brusque. His character is eminently upright and manly. He has made some enemies and a good many friends during his four years of command. I like him. He has been kind and hospitable towards me, and in some respects he is a pattern of a man and of a navy officer. I consider it a great piece of good fortune that I have had him here during my refitment. He has been generous and agreeable.

July 12th. My stay here has become very tiresome, and, I am sorry to say, it is likely to be prolonged indefinitely. The desertions have continued. Now that the repairs are drawing to a close, those who have made up their minds to go, take French leave, partly to escape the labor of fitting the ship out. The enlistment of our men in the naval service is a contract by which both parties are solemnly bound. The seamen and marines know this, and are very exacting in requiring of the government all that belongs to themselves under the contract. But such is the loose way of regarding these things here, that they lose sight of their own obligations entirely, reasoning among themselves somewhat in this way: "It is true that the value of my labor in New York or Philadelphia, at the time I entered the service, was only eighteen dollars a month, but here it is fifty or seventy-five; I

can get four hundred dollars for the voyage home : what a fool I am to remain here under such circumstances." The contrast is brought home to them more forcibly by the fact of their working side by side with the riggers of the yard who are getting five dollars a day, while they, employed in the same manner, doing the same thing, are receiving a little more than half a dollar only. This is very hard upon human nature. True, their conscience says to them, as honest Launcelot Gobbo's did to him, "Do not run ; scorn running with thy heels." But at the same time the most courageous fiend bids them pack : "via ! says the fiend ; away ! says the fiend, for the heavens ; rouse up a brave mind, says the fiend, and run." And certainly they think their conscience is but a kind of hard conscience to offer to counsel them to stay where they are, as they think they are, so unjustly treated. In California the state of society is unsettled ; the one object, the governing motive of conduct, is to get money, and he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent. This constant talk of money, of gold and high wages, of how much one earns here and another there, produces discontent. If my people had been always busy, and could have possibly remained on board the *Saint Mary's*, they would not have left me in such numbers. But idleness and discontent ruined them. This discovery of gold in Fraser's river turned their heads, and they have gone off in crowds, leaving some six or seven thousand dollars due them on the purser's books, a fact that gives one an idea of their prudence, and of their likelihood to gather riches, or to enjoy them when gathered. Some of these desertions have surprised me. The men were so respectable and well-behaved and had so much money due them. It was only to be accounted for by this extreme infatuation about getting gold, and this reckless life without a conscience or restraint, which characterizes California. One of them has pained me very much. This is Armstrong, my coxswain. He has been most faithful and good from the

first moment he came on board to the day of his leaving, in everything but that act. He is one of the most unexceptionally good men I have ever known in any station of life. I feel sorry for him ; his loss, which is loss of character, is greater than mine. But such an instance of defection is a painful experience in life ; its irresistible effect is to produce mistrust. The result of all these desertions is that my ship is unmanned and I cannot go to sea without shipping, in part, a new crew. You will wonder how I am to get men at these fabulous prices. But these excessive wages only last during the Fraser's river excitement, and that is subsiding. The last accounts from the North are discouraging to the miners and speculators. Fears are entertained that there will be a great deal of suffering there during the coming winter, and as yet no gold of any consequence has been exported. I have the strongest hopes that in three or four weeks I shall be able to ship hands enough to enable me to go to sea. I have no question that if I were in Puget Sound I could fill my ship with men, who are now living in tents, and picking up a scanty subsistence with the greatest difficulty. The trouble is for them to get down here. They have not the means of removing, and are helplessly bound to meet their fate. This bad news from Fraser's river is good for me ; but I am receiving my satisfaction at the expense of several thousand people who must be placed in a starving condition in order that I should be able to man the *Saint Mary's*. This is not an exemplification of the principle, "Live and let live."

Now that this sudden gold-hunting *furor* is dying away, and the Fraser's river mines are talked of as a humbug, a rumor is in circulation that this excitement has been created for a specific purpose. It is said to have been concerted between the Hudson Bay Company and the steamship company, for their mutual benefit. The charter of the former expires in the course of a year ; it has a large quantity of goods on hand (clothing, etc.), which would not sell for their

freight in any of the Pacific markets, and could only be disposed of through a sudden influx of emigrants. The existence of gold in Fraser's river has always been known to the company, which has been in the habit of purchasing it from the Indians; and the company has been steadily opposed to immigration, and to any participation in the benefits of its monopoly. Finding, however, that its charter will not be renewed, and wishing to close the concern as the mercantile phrase is, it resorted to this means of creating a market at home.

The steamship company's share of the profits of this speculation is to arise from the increase in the number of their passengers. It is curious to see how coolly such a scheme of rascality is talked of, involving, as it must, a great amount of human suffering in the loss of health, of place, of money; in cold, hunger, and disappointment; in the loss of home and character under temptation; and last but not least, in the wretchedness of those who are left behind. I have no opinion myself of the correctness of this rumor. I repeat it as I hear it. It seems to me, however, incredible. I should think the individuals who are agents of the two companies would be afraid to do it—to engage in a transaction so wicked, so grossly bad. Yet, as my friend Job says: "The wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power." And I have heard of something since my arrival here, coming from quite an authentic source, equally villainous. You will recall what I told you when I was in San Juan del Sur concerning the seizure of the lake steamers by the hero, statesman, and sage, General Walker, and their subsequent pretended sale to persons who, you must recollect in order to fully appreciate the moral beauty of the affair, were at that time the agents in San Francisco of the owner of these steamers. A friend here informs me that the whole proceedings, including the drawing up of the legal papers, were prepared and planned in San Francisco long beforehand, and that the correspondence

immediately preceding the seizure was a mere pretext for putting the project in execution. In this instance we have the example cited by my friend Zophar the Naamathite : " That which he labored for shall he restore, and shall not swallow it down : according to his substance shall the restitution be, and he shall not rejoice therein."

July 30th. If you wish to form a correct estimate of men you must be as rigid in your induction from the facts of observation here, as in any branch of knowledge relating to inanimate things. Your tenderness and kindness of heart interfere with your observations, in fact, become mixed up with them, and injure their value. Now this is not uncharitable. I may not be a whit less charitable to a man, in my *conduct*, because I believe that his faults of temper and judgment render him a mischief-breeder. " Charity is not a fool," as Dr. Walker once said to me. The apostles were enjoined to be not only harmless but wise.

August 9th. The time is fast drawing on when I am to leave this ship (the *Independence*) and go back to my dear *Saint Mary's*. How little did I dream when I left home that I should live nearly half a year on board the *Independence*, renewing, in a measure, the life of twenty years ago, occupying the same room good old Tom Breese lived in, and studying the past by the light of the present. It is a very different thing from living twenty years in the same place. It is the fact of my return, after an absence of twenty years, to so unusual a home, whence arises the peculiar interest. I cannot expect it to strike you as forcibly as it does me. But the truth is, all of my life that *is* life, or at least most of it, is comprised in that twenty years. How much would I like to live over some parts of the time. The cares and trials, whatever they were, are not prominent ; but there are some seasons of happiness, crowded with enjoyment and filled full of thought and action, that seem to me now in the retrospect very rich. . . . My life in this ship has been too quiet for

one of my active habits of mind and body. And though I have enjoyed excellent health, I feel a little the effects of the stagnation. One of the worst consequences of inaction is an unwillingness to move ; a dull, heavy, lazy state of acquiescence in things as they are. I have been so situated that I could neither hasten or retard the very work in which I was most interested. I shall be glad to get back my control ; but I will wind up this grumbling.

San Francisco, August 15th. I arrived and anchored on the morning of the 13th, and have been very busy since then in making arrangements for shipping a crew. I am satisfied that there will be less difficulty in procuring men than in rejecting them ; there are a great many persons here of all sorts who are without the means of living — among them quite a number of seamen. I went round to the shipping offices yesterday, and a crowd gathered round me wherever I stopped ; so eager were some of them to get a home, and a dinner without begging for it, that they offered to enter on the spot, and fifteen men signed the articles yesterday. To-morrow I begin in earnest, open an office at the “Sailors’ Home,” and receive at the same time on board. It would not surprise me if the complement of the ship were filled in one or two days. This is good, for you have no idea how melancholy it has made me feel, thinking of the *Saint Mary’s* unmanned and inefficient. As a captain, it is to me a mortification and a pain to have the outward semblance of a man-of-war without the life within that gives it power and reality. When the crew is complete and the new men thoroughly trained in their exercises, I shall once more walk my quarter-deck with the satisfaction of being able to do all that can be reasonably expected of us.

The *Saint Mary’s* sailed on August 26th, and for the short remainder of the cruise was kept on the coast

of Central America. Davis was relieved of the command in February, 1859, at Panama, and returned to Cambridge and resumed his post at the head of the "Nautical Almanac." During the cruise of the *Saint Mary's* Davis prepared a treatise on naval architecture, which, however, he never published; and he translated Kerhallet's "General Examination of the Pacific Ocean," adding notes of his own. This book is still the standard authority for the navigation of the Pacific. During his absence from home his translation of Gauss's "Theoria Motus Corporum Cœlestium" had appeared and been well received, and he had the satisfaction of giving to the mathematical world the first English version of the method of least squares.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE NAVY DEPARTMENT IN 1861

WHEN Davis returned from his cruise in the Pacific, he settled down again to the old life in Cambridge. His place at the head of the Almanac had been temporarily filled during his absence by Professor Joseph Winlock, and he now resumed it, and, as far as possible, the old mode of life and its interests. Through the increasing political excitement of the times, he worked steadily at the Almanac, and at the labors entailed by his membership of several harbor commissions, particularly that of Boston. There were also, as before, occasional journeys to Washington on "Nautical Almanac" business, and for consultation with Bache and the other members of harbor commissions. In this way the two years from the spring of 1859 to the spring of 1861 were passed. He was in Washington in March of the latter year, on duties connected with Boston harbor and the projected Cape Cod Canal, and he draws the following picture of the early days of the first Republican administration:—

March 9th. Yesterday morning, Friday, I set off early for the department, in and about which I passed the day. I found that the officers of the navy were to be formally received by the Secretary and President, and being in uniform



(though the others were in full dress), I fell in and had the pleasure of seeing the President and Mrs. Lincoln. In the former I was agreeably disappointed. His likenesses, such as are seen in prints, etc., give no idea of his appearance, — I might almost say, none whatever. His countenance is far from ugly, and its expression is decidedly attractive. The play of features and the easy smile are more engaging than the pictures make him. He is awkward in his figure and manners, but his awkwardness is not *gaucherie*. It is by no means vulgar. The impression he makes is altogether favorable. . . . The absorbing topic of conversation here is the state of the country. . . . But the greatest gloom and anxiety prevail among those whom I have seen. I cannot conceive how it should be otherwise, when our fate is taken out of our own hands and is dependent on the voices and opinions of one or two persons. It is thought and feared that the crisis will come upon the demand of the South Carolina commissioners for Fort Sumter. If the demand should be peremptorily refused, the attack will be made from the batteries on Morris Island and the mainland, and from the forts Moultrie and Pinckney. This seems to be the point of final rupture.

Up to the breaking out of the war, the ordinary business of the Navy Department had been conducted by the Secretary and his clerks and by the chiefs of the several bureaus, without the direct assistance of the officers of the navy. The business was simple in its nature, and was not complicated by any elaborate forms of correspondence or accounts. Details of naval officers to duty were managed in the Secretary's office, generally under the supervision of the chief clerk and by the personal direction of the Secretary himself. The war brought such an increase of labor in the

administrative branch of the service that the ordinary methods were quite inadequate to its proper execution. There was not only the rapid increase of the fleet, and the appointment of a large number of volunteer officers, but the defection of the Southern officers, and the uncertainty as to the loyalty and trustworthiness of some who remained in the service, made it absolutely imperative to have not only an increase in the administrative force, but an intelligent and well-informed class of assistants who should be cognizant of the needs of the service in a sudden emergency, and qualified by personal acquaintance with officers to deal with a condition of affairs in which doubt and uncertainty prevailed. Under these circumstances the Secretary turned naturally and inevitably to naval officers, and to naval officers of known character and standing. Davis was summoned to Washington "for duty connected with the discipline and efficiency of the naval service," and he remained on duty at the department through the whole of the spring and summer of 1861.

In order to deal intelligently with the questions relating to the personnel of the service, a new bureau was created, the Bureau of Detail, established at first only by departmental order, and not sanctioned by law until two years later. Commodore Hiram Paulding was the head of this bureau, and Davis was assigned to it, his associate being Commander Maxwell Woodhull. The bureau was charged with the general business of the detail and assignment of officers, the appointment and instruction of volunteer officers, and the purchase

of ships, with other matters related more or less directly to these principal heads. The work of this bureau was extremely confining, and Davis was really the executive head of it; for Commodore Paulding was now well advanced in age, and exercised the functions of a director rather than those of an active chief. Besides the work of this bureau, Davis had also the secretaryship of a confidential board, consisting of the chiefs of the several bureaus, charged with the duty of "considering and acting upon such subjects connected with the naval service as may be submitted to [them] by the department for their opinion at this important juncture of our national affairs;" and the board was also directed to "make such suggestions regarding the naval service generally as may occur to the board." This was virtually a board of admiralty, although its proceedings did not have the stamp of authority, and its very existence was strictly confidential and was supposed to be kept secret. Davis seldom alludes to this board in his letters. In addition to his duties in the department, he retained the directorship of the "Nautical Almanac," whose affairs he controlled by correspondence; and he also remained a member of several harbor commissions. Besides these multifarious duties, he became secretary and member of a commission of conference on proposed naval and military operations on the Southern coasts and the conduct of the blockade. Something of the inner history of this commission will appear in the letters which follow. Almost immediately on the breaking out of hostilities, it was proposed to discontinue the coast survey, and, as at least one half

of its field of operations was rendered inaccessible by the war, it would at first sight appear that the proposition to discontinue, or rather to suspend, the operations of the survey, was not altogether an unreasonable one. But the cleverness of the superintendent turned the war to actual account, and made it not only not a hindrance, but a positive benefit to the prosperity of the survey. Bache was a man fully capable of a move of this kind, and, where a less active and enterprising chief would have passively acquiesced in what seemed to be the inevitable, the situation simply stimulated Bache to the exertion of his great natural talents for management and persuasion. Davis had been so intimately associated with Bache, and his position at the department was so important, that Bache turned naturally to him for assistance. The result of the combination was that the coast survey gave almost inestimable service to the government during the war, both on land and at sea, and came out at the end of the war stronger and more secure in its position than it had ever been before. The first move of Bache's appears in the establishment of the conference, of which he and Davis were members, his own functions being to furnish the topographical and hydrographical information necessary to the formation of plans of operation. Du Pont was the senior member of the conference, and Major J. G. Barnard, of the engineers, was the fourth member. Davis was junior member and secretary.

It would reach quite beyond the scope of this memoir to discuss at length the proceedings of this conference and its plans and recommendations. Admiral Porter

said of it that the results of its labors, when placed in the hands of the Secretary of the Navy, were of great service in enabling the department to take prompt and proper measures for the capture of the ports along the Southern coast. Its plans were very comprehensive, embracing the whole of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, including the Mississippi River, and they contemplated not only such operations as were necessary to make the blockade effective, but likewise operations of a purely military character. Hatteras Inlet was the first fruit of its labors, the object being to capture and hold the inlets into the sounds of North Carolina, and cut off inland water communication with Norfolk and Richmond. Port Royal followed; and speaking of the results of that victory, Admiral Porter said it afforded "an opportunity of throwing into the heart of the South a great army, had we of the North been wise enough to force the fighting in a quarter where it would have eventually brought matters to a speedy conclusion."

Although not explicitly so stated in its memoirs, something of this kind was undoubtedly contemplated by the commission. But unfortunately the great armies of the North were necessarily otherwise engaged. To capture a port and hold it as a base for the blockade, maintaining a sufficient garrison to act as a menace to the surrounding country, was as far as the North could go at this stage of the war. The invasion of the Carolinas, with the Savannah River as a base, could only be effected after four years of fighting, and after the dismemberment and isolation of the Confederacy

by the complete conquest of the Mississippi, and by the rigor of the blockade and the capture of the principal ports of entry for blockade runners. In 1861 the popular cry was, "On to Richmond!" But, even if popular clamor could have been disregarded, no force sufficient for an invasion of the South could have been withdrawn from the lines of the Potomac and the West. The North was not always in a position to force the fighting, but on the contrary its most strenuous efforts in 1861 were directed toward covering the capital. The recommendations of the commission, as far as they related to naval operations along the coast, were mostly carried out, though not always in the order of sequence laid down; its reports furnished valuable information to the commanders of blockading squadrons; and the principle of its recommendations, namely, a close blockade, with the successive capture of the enemy's ports, formed the policy of the department.

At no time during his service in the Navy Department did Davis regard his position there as anything more than temporary. He had no taste for the routine work which he was set to do, and the labors of the Bureau of Detail were particularly irksome to him; but although he disliked them, he performed them none the less heartily and zealously, and he was probably one of the very best men that could have been selected for the work of detail and assignment at this time. He was almost universally admired and respected in the service, had very few personal enemies, and his long connection with duties lying outside the narrow scope of strictly professional work raised him above the suspicion of sordid or

personal motives in the performance of a duty which is always attended with difficulties of this nature. Moreover, he was an excellent judge of character, and the service had confidence in his judgment. Still, he pined for active service, but he well knew that his turn would come.

The extracts from his letters which follow have been selected as bearing directly on the work of the department and the conference; and they throw a side light on the condition of affairs in Washington, while they bring out in stronger colors the character of the writer. The letters are all addressed to Mrs. Davis.

May 19th. The week I have passed in the Bureau of Detail has more than satisfied me. I don't like the duty, and am not particularly suited for it; not half so well, for example, as Captain Emmons, whom I find there, and whom I am expected to relieve. He seems to get along well with Commodore Paulding, and it will be a great mistake to remove him. The business of his life has been, and is, to preserve and record the past and current history of the navy, and his register is the only one by which it can be ascertained, at this moment, where every officer of the navy is, and who has resigned.

May 22d. When I left Bache's on Monday, it was agreed that I should dine there, if possible, and drink tea there, if not impossible, every Tuesday. I was there last night and had a pleasant evening. I found that Bache has a plan of his own to carry out, which involves my remaining here, and some other changes of another kind. He wishes to establish a military commission, or advisory council, to determine military proceedings and operations along the coast. The coast survey is to furnish the requisite information of the hydrographical and topographical nature. I am to be junior mem-

ber and secretary of this board. Du Pont is to take Commodore Paulding's place at the head of this bureau. General Totten is to be the military member of the commission. I have only arrived at a full understanding of this plan this morning. Fox, the chief clerk of the Navy Department, has already been brought into the scheme of the commission — how much further he had gone, or been advised, in respect to Bache's plans, I do not exactly know. In the meantime I must wait. Philosophy and patience must be my resort. And when I consider the present state of public affairs, and reflect upon the hopes I have cherished, the plans projected, the apprehensions felt, the anxieties suffered, all of which have been rudely swept away and annihilated by the recent political convulsions of the country, — canceled and reduced to the merest insignificance, — I am admonished to be patient; to be ready but not too calculating or anxious; to wait and trust.

May 30th. I could not now leave this place. Paulding begins to depend on me. There was disorder and confusion when I came into the office, which are now somewhat removed. A *confidential* advisory board in the department has been appointed, of which I am secretary (this between ourselves), and finally, there is the commission of Bache. The position is very disagreeable to me, but I am here and must stay.

June 1st. I am perfectly enthralled here, and have stuck my fingers into so many pies; have heated so many irons, that I have made myself a prisoner. The commodore leaves to me the execution of the current duties of the office: (1) I retain the direction of the "Nautical Almanac"; (2) I am secretary (as I told you before) of a confidential advisory board; (3) I shall be secretary of Bache's commission; (4) and Fox, the chief clerk, has begun to ask me to help him occasionally in the business of the department, correspondence for example; (5) I like to be useful; but this threatens to confine me too much.



June 4th. I set out to go to the Smithsonian last night, but it threatened rain and looked so black with clouds and bright with lightning that I went home. To-day I shall go and dine with Bache, to see the last of Ben<sup>1</sup> who goes to-morrow. You must not think from what I have written that because I am dissatisfied I am unhappy. I am afraid I have given you the idea that I regret having offered my services to Commodore Paulding. On the contrary, I am much better contented to be here, in the centre of action and of motion, than I could possibly be in Cambridge, ignorant of, and taking no part in, the great business of the time. Besides, I fully realize, or if not fully at least in a great measure, my expectation that here at Washington, in the Navy Department, I know what is going on, and have it somewhat in my power to choose, when I leave here, where I go. There is a great deal in this.

June 7th. Commodore Paulding left here this morning for home, and is to be absent ten days probably; in the meantime I am to get along as well as I can. The business of this bureau, you are aware, is to assign their respective duties and places to officers of all grades, except the medical corps. Now, as there are many reasons for preferring one duty, station, or ship to another, and as it is impossible to know much of the individual preferences, or to make anything approaching to an accurate estimate of the nice distinctions of service and the claims founded on it, we are frequently giving offense, or doing favors or performing some act of signal injustice or justice, without being at all aware of it. But Commodore Paulding is peculiarly fitted for this place. He is frank, cordial, and very gentlemanly in his manners, generous in his nature, very just, and particularly distinguished by a scrupulous regard for the rights and feelings of others. He is, of course, very popular, and his popularity is of the steady sort that does not wax or wane with circumstances. But I, who

<sup>1</sup> Professor Peirce.

have little claim to the qualifications that so admirably suit him for the place, should be very sorry to stay here without him; and my mind is very much exercised in thinking what I shall do when he goes.

June 14th. Bache is wonderful in his way. The general expectation has been that the coast survey, being deprived of a large part of its field of usefulness, would decline in power and be reduced in occupation. Some of those kind-hearted people, whose happiness is impaired by too much success and prosperity on the part of their neighbors, have remarked to Mr. Bache in a tone of condolence, but with a smile of satisfaction, that they supposed the coast survey would be stopped now. But, in fact, it has never been so distinguished and important as now. Bache's ingenuity has been exercised in discovering methods of making the coast survey coöperative in the great movement of the day. The new commission I have already spoken of; in addition to this, he has made special surveys, made and distributed maps of the seat of war, and, above all, he has managed so as to have calls made on his office for reconnoissances; and he is now, by means of his assistants, actually performing the duty of a topographical corps to this division of the army, for which service he has received the thanks and compliments of the President, the Secretary of War, and the general-in-chief. And his assistants will accompany the army in its advance, and form the active members of the topographical staff. He certainly possesses a very remarkable talent for this kind of government.

June 25th. Since I began this letter Du Pont has come in, and finally the board of conference has been arranged, — Du Pont, Bache, Major Barnard of the Engineers, and myself as secretary.

June 26th. Yesterday being Tuesday, I dined with Bache. Du Pont was there, and the dinner was remarkably pleasant, and the chat very *chatty* and entertaining. I could not refrain

from telling Captain Du Pont something of the management by which the board of conference was created : he was very much amused, and understood the whole thing at once. He is quite pleased at being ordered on this service, which is secret, important, and complex. He likes, too, being in Washington during the coming session of Congress. Du Pont, you know, is a man of society and a greater favorite than ever.

June 30th. The meeting of the conference yesterday was an interesting one, and it is probable that we shall be able to make ourselves useful, even very useful. I cannot put on paper the subjects on which we deliberate, for fear of the accidental miscarriage of my letters, or of their being examined. It is a curious and rather uncomfortable state of things here, that we know (or most strongly suspect) that we have among us spies who communicate freely with the other party. Do you remember that the secretary of that born son of hell and darkness, Philip II., was the spy of Motley's hero, William? A spy with us, however, has no reason to fear so cruel a fate as that of Philip's secretary, if found out. . . . The enemy is welcome to know the truth of us. Our purpose is earnest, and our means of fulfilling that purpose daily increase. Truth is our defense, as falsehood is the trust of the other party. . . . I am, just at this moment, very much occupied, and, I believe, rather important. All the irons are in the fire, and I have to be ready to strike each one as it becomes hot.

The return of the commodore to the bureau is very agreeable and welcome. We get along very well together, and now that Du Pont is here it seems a sort of family concern. The commodore said yesterday to Du Pont, "Is n't it pleasant to have Charles Davis here!" You remember how restless I was at home after the war broke out. Now I am satisfied in so far as that I am well employed.

July 16th. Your long letter, received this morning, was

most welcome to me. I see by the slip you inclose that the business of our conference (as we call it) is known, though we endeavored to keep it secret. It keeps me very busy. I am told to-day that our plans of operation give great satisfaction. I hope this is true, for that reward will sweeten the labor. This association has gone far to revive my pleasant old companionship with Du Pont. . . . Farragut, the commandant of the navy yard at Mare Island, was here this morning. I was glad to see him.

July 18th. A rather alarming attack has been made on the coast survey, and I am called to the rescue. This is heaping Pelion upon Ossa. I was at the Capitol yesterday on this business, and have to go again to-day. I dine with Bache.

July 19th. As you know from the public prints what the object of our commission is, or rather what its objects are, I may indulge myself in the gratification of telling you that our reports, or memoirs (drawn up by myself), have created great interest and attention (*furore* Du Pont calls it), and our plans have been adopted. It is satisfactory to find that our labor has been appreciated by the Cabinet. Du Pont runs off again to-day, to go home Saturday and Sunday. I envy him his happiness. Bache, who was in the office to-day on business of the commission, says that I must be ready to go to Boston with him next month; and I mean to arrange it if possible. This is what I have kept my eyes upon all the time. The Boston harbor commission is my grand refuge. The Boston *flats* will provide a *natural* way for my turning a *sharp* corner away from the bureau. I dined yesterday with Bache (instead of Tuesday), in company with Du Pont, Fox, and Professor Frazer, of Philadelphia; a pleasant dinner. In the evening, work.

July 21st. I must tell you again, to prepare you for it, that a single week's leave of absence from the office is the most that I can promise myself. In these stirring times it

does not do to be absent from one's post of duty. This is a settled principle. I should, if the opportunity were favorable, ask for some duty, or, as I have suggested before, fasten on the Boston harbor commission as an excuse for leaving my station. And I must say to you that, dearly as I would love to be at home with you and the children, I would not ask such an indulgence, nor accept it if offered. It is a most grateful thing to me to have the opportunity of being as useful as I am at this moment, and I would not lose it for the world. There are several respects in which my previous occupations have qualified me to meet the wants of the times. One is my habit of writing, another is my French. Now, if I stay away too long some one must take my place. I shall teach people to do without me. "To be done" (working), as my friend William says, — I quote from memory, — "is to hang quite out of mind, like a rusty suit of armor, in monumental mockery."

July 27th. Sunday does not bring rest, and some of the time I meant to devote to you I have been obliged to bestow on business. You know, without my telling you, that I am member and secretary of a mixed commission on the blockade. We have sent in three papers, and I have a fourth done and nearly copied. As I have the drawing up of these papers, and the arrangement and presentation of the information and ideas collected and suggested in the conference, I thought it would please you to be told that Mr. Seward especially, and the Cabinet generally, were pleased with them. The government (how wonderfully, wonderfully tardy and dilatory it is in its motions!) has finally determined to act upon our plans, and this morning two of the papers were read to General Scott, in a council of officers of which Du Pont was one, and he has just been in to tell me that the general pronounced them to possess high ability, and said he indorsed every word of them. This I tell you, because you will be more reconciled to my absence from home, knowing that I am doing

service to the country at this critical period of her history. . . . You will be glad to hear that, if the promotions are made in compliance with the nominations before Congress (as they probably will be), I shall be only the second on the list of commanders. And if the retiring bill passes, two vacancies will soon be made, and made without injuring, on the contrary by benefiting, the retiring officers. This retiring bill, if it passes, I shall have a special right to profit by, for Mr. Grimes, the senator who introduced it, came to me for the details and provisions of the bill.

August 7th. About my intentions next autumn and winter, on this subject there is much to be said. In times like these, an officer can have but one desire and one principle of conduct, the desire to go where he can be most useful, and, whatever his station, the principle of doing his duty to the utmost of his ability. *Nil reputans actum, si quid superesset agendum.* It would be affectation in me to deny that I have managed to make myself useful in this office. During the few days of Fox's absence, the Secretary has referred to me several matters of importance; and Fox, now assistant secretary, often puts in my hands certain portions of his voluminous correspondence that relate to my specialties. Then on the boards, too, and this bureau, which is gradually expanding under my control, and owes to my efforts a large part of its present (unfinished) status. This office is not yet a permanent one, is not established by law, and may not, therefore, be continued.

August 12th. Mr. Fox and Commodore Paulding came home yesterday morning, . . . and now you must understand the state of the case. The government has purchased a large number of vessels in New York which are in the hands of the workmen undergoing such changes as are necessary to fit them for an armament, and the purchase and outfit of these vessels furnish occasions for going to New York on duty. The commodore has hitherto profited by these occasions, but

I find that I can go now, under circumstances that will enable me to run home for a day. You will ask why I do not make this my *harbor* or *Almanac* visit. First, because Bache can't go now, and second, I don't call this my visit home, but only a run for relaxation: my going home for a visit is another thing.

August 28th. Yesterday I found it out of the range of possibility to write a line, unless I gave up dining with Bache, as I had promised. Things went as wrong as a bad memory, a fit of indigestion, and a complicated series of misapprehensions acting on ill temper could make them. It was in vain I tried to disentangle matters; finally I gave up the struggle and rushed off to Bache, rest, and Liebfraumilch (or Rudesheimer). But there, alas! I was disappointed again. And when Bache learned from me that the army had made no progress whatever in the matter you wot of, he danced round, jumped up and down in his chair, and tore his hair, and I could really have sat down in my chair and cried, when I saw that our plan (of the conference) for seizing and occupying the coast of Georgia was about to be anticipated by the authorities of the State. My philosophy and my hopes are subjected to the severest trial.

August 29th. I grieve to say that my feelings have undergone a change since I left home. I have seen by the papers that our plans for seizing and occupying the Southern waters have been anticipated, and the news is received with the most alarming indifference. I begin now to share in the general doubt and despondency, so far as our operations are concerned. This feeling will soon pass into indifference, I presume. I have most deliberately determined to abstain, as long as possible, from worrying about what I cannot help. I find I exercise no personal influence, and I long since discovered that it is time and effort wasted to try to make people think and act contrary to their natures, or to the turn and habit of their minds. I have an indefinite feeling or

apprehension that the discovery of our plans for the occupation of the Southern coast, made so long ago, and presented and approved, will hereafter make trouble, and I really begin to fear that my hopes of the commission's utility will fall to the ground. But I go on and work out the problems, with no less industry, but with a subdued zeal. When the whole subject is finished, I shall feel that we *endeavored* to do well. We are now in the Gulf, and there is a large amount remaining to be done. I am sorry to write in so gloomy a strain but this is the way I feel to-day. To-morrow I may feel better.

September 2d. The excitement was so great yesterday morning, in consequence of the news from Hatteras Inlet, that I found it impossible to write you any more than a single line. But I did not share in the general exultation, though I was highly gratified at the result as far as it went. What was done fell so far short of our original project, and the impolicy of stopping in the midst of such a career of success, both of these added together, made me feel more disappointed than gratified. What Mr. Pleydell said after kissing Lucy Betram should have been the thought of the commanding officer: "*On ne s'arrête pas dans un si beau chemin.*" But we are preparing to set it right by directing the completion of the work, about which, I have no doubt, there will be some difficulty.

September 4th. I am to have the pleasure of dining to-day with General McClellan, and we are to take this occasion of talking over our projects. I am quite occupied with the prospect of meeting the man who seems to be the man of the age and the times in this country. I shall give you my impressions of him to-morrow [which, unfortunately, he did not do, as press of business prevented his writing again until]

September 6th. I inclose a note from Du Pont written last Saturday. It may amuse you. I feel better than I did a little while ago when I felt truly depressed by the apparent



inaction of the chiefs — the leaders. Hatteras is good ; but there must be better coming.

Saturday, 31 Aug., '61.

MY DEAR DAVIS, — Your P. S. in pencil to a letter you forwarded struck me as the first inkling of gloom from your brave heart and well-strung nerves ; but I suppose you were transmitting the tone of your surroundings more than your own feelings. I never had but one misgiving, that I mentioned to you, whether our government *machinery* was equal to the emergency. “Just too late” would seem to be our motto just now. Bourbon-like, we do not seem to do a capital thing soon enough. . . . But we must put our shoulders to the wheel and exert to the utmost every power God has given us. If we are not successful in this struggle it must not be your fault or mine. Affec’yly, F. D. P.

September 8th. I have begun to open my batteries on the subject of going home to attend to Boston harbor and “Nautical Almanac” business, and I am in hopes that when the present press and crowd of work are somewhat relaxed, I shall be permitted to run away and make a longer visit home than the last. About such things both Mr. Welles and Mr. Fox are the most amiable people in the world. Though they do make one boil over with grief and impatience at their singular want of appreciation of the virtue of promptness, and of *the value of circumstances* — *the value of circumstances*. Now the terror existing in the State of North Carolina, a circumstance so much in our favor ; and the excited expectation of the North, a circumstance so much in our favor ; and the confidence with which our troops and seamen have been inspired, a circumstance so much in our favor ; all these will be allowed to subside and die out, without a just estimation of, or a turning to account, their inestimable value. If they would only lay aside the daily detail of business, and

place themselves for a moment on the perch of history ! If they could only be brought to realize the wish of Betty the maid, and stand on the bank and see themselves ride by ! We talk like a book in a red cover, but I have often to think of that maxim of conduct I learned from sister Louisa, "One must not expect to change natural qualities." I am ready to cry over it. But I must hold my tongue, and command and restrain my thoughts even. Heaps of maxims and sententious sayings of my wise and dear friend Shakespeare crowd into my mind. Examples of history rise before me, press upon my thoughts, till I fear that zeal, growing out of too much thinking on the subject, may take the place of knowledge. So, after all, it is perhaps well that the direction is not in my hands. If it had been I should certainly have had another little expedition on foot, which we (the conference) have been urging upon Mr. Fox with more than eagerness — with pertinacity.

September 10th. Yesterday was one of those unsatisfactory days when one is busy all the time and does nothing, makes no progress. Hours were wasted in the merest idle talk at a meeting I was obliged to attend. I have schooled myself to some patience on such occasions, though I am astounded (no word less strong will express it) at the frivolous consumption of business time — precious and needed. There is so ready a disposition to find fault with people we differ from, and we are so apt, under the influence of pedantic notions, to do injustice to minds and habits of thought that differ from our own, that I endeavor to restrain my impatience and disposition to criticise. You know from your own observation how one's tongue will run on, when the argument is our neighbors' shortcomings measured by our own standard. I am very much disposed just now to think that Fox is not going to rise to the height of the argument. He is very, *very* clever, very prompt in the business of the department, and very even-minded. But he has disappointed my first expectations in

several respects. He has a fancy for planning, rather than executing, so that while he is always ready to consider any scheme, he is equally ready to postpone any step towards the execution of a plan however maturely ripened and deliberately adopted; and will set aside an old plan of which the gloss is worn off, to revel in some brand-new speculation; some "fire-new stamp of honor." I have passed many anxious hours in cogitations growing out of this weakness of his. But I think it will all come right. He has a gigantic capacity for work, when he is stimulated to exertion, and makes all difficulties yield before him.

September 11th. The dear old commodore has not gone yet, but as the board of which he is president is to meet on the 16th in New York he must necessarily take his departure soon. I shall not, however, as you suppose, remain here uninterruptedly. The expedition I told you of is in full preparation, and I shall take my place in it. I am a little afraid to write freely on the subject, afraid that something may happen to my letter. But you must content yourself with knowing, for the present, that no change of consequence has been made in our plans. . . . It is certainly quite an honor, and I am sensible of it, to be retained here. I do not mean to undervalue it: but at the same time I think the place a temporary one only, not permanent. In regard to the duties of the bureau, I fit in, that is my chief recommendation. There are no rubs, no contradictions, no quarrels, and hitherto no misunderstandings. I keep my little sphere of duties active and well-ordered, and am on friendly terms with everybody. My position as member and secretary of the mixed commission is a confidential one, and of considerable use — great use I should say. We are constantly consulted, and have had a meeting to-day. To come back to our Bureau of Detail, it is in some respects rather an incumbrance than a convenience to the assistant secretary, who would prefer to answer most of the applications himself. In one word I have great doubts of its permanent existence.

September 18th. Yesterday Commodore Paulding took his final leave of the office and left me in charge. But my reign will be very short-lived. My Southern expedition takes me off very soon. To-day I give up the "Nautical Almanac." I am sorry to do it, but I could not retain it, and it is always mine when I want it. Winlock takes my place, and he will be glad to get it.

There are two facts brought out in Davis's connection with the Navy Department at this time which might be worth the notice of any one who cared to make a study of naval administration, if, indeed, it were worth any one's while to do so. The first is, that the existence of an admiralty board, charged with the initiation and suggestion of naval affairs, was, for no clearly ostensible reason, kept a secret. Whatever the reasons for secrecy may have been at the time, they are not apparent now, and as the question has become a matter of history, there can be no impropriety, at this distance of time, in recording and discussing the fact. The necessity for such a board might be sufficiently manifest, and it is difficult to see in what manner its open recognition could do harm to the public service. The other fact is that the vigilance of the department was not sufficient to guard from publicity the proceedings and results of a military commission planning hostile operations on the enemy's coasts, and whose very existence should have remained a profound secret; and that the public at the North, and the enemy at the South, became cognizant of the department's intentions almost as soon as they were formulated and approved. The juxtaposition of these two facts is very suggestive.

But there was another service in which Davis was engaged in the summer of 1861, which has been more far-reaching in its results than his labors in the bureau or as member and secretary of the conference. He was a member of the board on ironclad ships, the famous board which authorized the building of the *Monitor*.<sup>1</sup>

The board recommended the construction of three armored vessels, the *New Ironsides*, the *Galena*, and the *Monitor*. The latter was the design of a foreigner, a Swede, to whose mind the conception of a water war-machine had been suggested in youth by the contemplation, in the waters of his own country, of rafts of logs with little huts built upon them. This remarkable circumstance, like the anecdote of Newton and the apple, has been cited as an easy and familiar illustration of genius. The *Monitor* made so dramatic a figure in the civil war that it is hardly possible, even now, to discuss, without incurring the charge of prejudice, the true lesson which she left when she sank at the end of a tow-line. But the board of 1861 stated in guarded and temperate language the exact truth with regard to her qualities, and its opinion could be reiterated to-day as a just and impartial judgment on her design.

The board has been accused of prejudice and ignorance. It has been said that its members were obstructionists, standing in the way of progress and improvement. It has been said of Davis in particular that he held out against the *Monitor* design because he could not be satisfied of the vessel's stability, and only yielded

<sup>1</sup> This board was established by act of Congress of August 3, 1861.

at last at the personal intercession of the President. This accusation rests on hearsay evidence alone, but it is probably untrue, because Davis knew that the defect of a raft, as a form of ship, is not want of stability, but rather excess of stability, a truth which his critics have mostly failed to apprehend. So far from a desire to obstruct, the board was willing to adopt the design because it recognized the fact that shipbuilding was at that time in a transition stage, and to quote its own language,<sup>1</sup> "This plan of a floating battery is novel, but seems to be based upon a plan which will render the battery shot and shell proof." The board guarded its recommendation by the reasonable proviso that the builder should guarantee, under penalty, the points and

<sup>1</sup> So far as it relates to the *Monitor* design, the report of the board may be quoted in full : "Our immediate demands seem to require, first, so far as practicable, vessels invulnerable to shot, of light draught of water, to penetrate our shoal harbors, rivers, and bayous. We therefore favor the construction of this class of vessels before going into a more perfect system of large ironclad sea-going vessels of war. . . .

"*J. Ericsson*, New York. — This plan of a floating battery is novel, but seems to be based upon a plan which will render the battery shot and shell proof. We are somewhat apprehensive that her properties for sea are not such as a sea-going vessel should possess. But she may be moved from one place to another on the coast in smooth water. We recommend that an experiment be made with one battery of this description on the terms proposed, with a guarantee and forfeiture in case of failure in any of the properties and points proposed.

"Price \$275,000 : length of vessel, 172 feet; breadth of beam, 41 feet; depth of hold,  $11\frac{1}{2}$  feet ; time, 100 days; draught of water, 10 feet; displacement, 1255 tons; speed per hour, 9 statute miles."

Davis was the junior member of the board, and probably drew up the report. The other members were Commodores Joseph Smith and Hiram Paulding. The *Monitor* was only one of many designs, all more or less novel, submitted for consideration. See the *Report of the Secretary of the Navy for 1862*, Appendix.

properties claimed for the vessel. It also recognized the peculiar necessities of the country at the time, and the fact that the *Monitor* could be built and made available in haste. This surely is not obstruction.

After the dramatic combat in Hampton Roads, the *Monitor* became the recognized type of armored ship for the United States navy, and it remains, in the popular mind, the American standard to this day. Its extreme advocates went so far as to build an entire class of these vessels which actually would not float with their guns and stores on board, such was the mania for excessively low freeboard and decks awash with the sea ; in other words, for the raft body. It has been said that the *Monitor* revolutionized naval warfare. It would be more correct to say that the first combat between ironclad ships revolutionized naval warfare. It is a perfectly obvious proposition that any recognized type of steamship with six inches of armor on her sides would have done better in the fight in Hampton Roads than the *Monitor* did. It is also a fact that this combat relieved the people of the North from a state of terror, and left them in no condition of mind to pronounce an impartial judgment. The several nations of Europe, passing through the transition stages of naval development, immediately abandoned the *Monitor* and her prototypes ; and the revolving turret, the only feature of real merit in the whole design, was not, probably, an original conception of the inventor of the ship.

The defects of the *Monitor* type are, excessive stability at the expense of steadiness as a gun platform ; extremely limited endurance or radius of action ; total

lack of reserve of buoyancy ; extreme slowness of fire ; inability to move, even from port to port, without a consort ; extreme slowness in speed and manœuvre ; and total inability to cruise and keep the seas. The advantages to set off against these objections are apparent invulnerability, and the minimum of target surface. That is, the ship is preëminently a defensive battery with the minimum of offensive power ; but she possesses another quality which has given her a transcendent value in American eyes ; she is a cheap and ingenious, and at the same time a spurious and trivial substitute for a recognized and accepted standard in war.

It may seem far-fetched to trace the causes of the popularity of the *Monitor* back to Magna Charta ; but the supineness and indifference of the people towards military and naval affairs, and the hostility to standing armies and to regular methods of warfare, both on land and at sea, which is inherent in the nation's blood, are founded upon the security and jealousy of civil liberty. The amateur in war has always the nation's sympathy, — he is ready-made and picturesque, — but let the citizen be trained to proficiency in the profession of arms, and he becomes an object of aversion. “ Go to ! I hate him and his trade.” In the darkest days of the Revolution, it was always safe to insult the army ; in the hour of success, it was considered a politic and expedient thing to do so. But it was the wisdom of the immortal leader who was first in war (and easily first in peace), which could reverse the popular creed, and teach his army to be good soldiers first and better citizens afterwards, and which saved the country from the miseries of military despotism.



The navy could never be feared as a menace to civil liberty at home, but it has felt the full force of the nation's aversion to everything military except names. Warfare was learned as a lesson in the four years from 1861 to 1865, and it was learned thoroughly because it was learned in anguish. What would have been thought of a leader who, at the end of the civil war, should have proposed that armies should be organized without heavy infantry or artillery, and with only a skirmish line strong enough to drive in the enemy's outposts, but too weak to meet his columns in battle? Yet that was precisely the naval policy of the country as exemplified in the heavy frigates, like the *Independence* for example, and up to and even including the period of the civil war itself. The frigates left a glorious legacy to the navy and to the country. If not war, they were at least magnificent and perilously near war; but the deluded champions of the *Monitor* could find, in the revulsion which followed the civil war, a plan of passive defense better suited to the temper of a people blinded by prejudice, unversed in naval affairs, and deceived by success in a circumscribed field, and insist that the safety of the republic, with three thousand miles of ocean frontier, must be intrusted to ships which could not cruise or keep the seas, which could neither fight at sea, chase, nor run away, and whose virtues in combat were the virtues of the armadillo; and in such craft American seamen might skulk in "shallow harbors, rivers, and bayous," where an active enemy could not get at them, but must be left at large, to ravage everything else in sight.

Happily, as the nation begins to awake to the obligations of its power, this delusion is passing. A teacher of our own — I had almost written a prophet, for he has not been without honor save in his own country — has shown in a new light the true meaning of the sea-power. We now know<sup>1</sup> that the judgment of the board of 1861 was exactly correct, and that, as far as they relate to the real naval interests of this country, the expedient of the frigate and the fallacy of the *Monitor* are as dead as the Arian Heresy.

<sup>1</sup> This chapter was written before the war with Spain. It is needless to adduce the experience of that war to prove the utter inadequacy of the *Monitor* type in serious naval operations : and yet more of these vessels are to be built.

## CHAPTER VIII

### WASHINGTON IN 1861

THE preceding chapter has dealt exclusively with Davis's official service in the Navy Department in 1861. It may not be amiss to take a brief glance at his private life and surroundings in Washington at this most exciting period of history. When Davis was summoned to Washington in May he came on alone, leaving his family in Cambridge. There were several reasons for not breaking up the household. In the first place, it was commonly supposed that the war would only last a few months. The Confederate army was to be driven out of Virginia, Richmond was to be captured at once, and the rebellion suppressed in the border States ; after which, if any forces remained in arms, the subjugation of the South would be a simple matter. That was the popular conception of the war, in which almost everybody shared. Moreover, as the summer advanced, and the Northern armies met with reverses rather than successes, Washington was too precarious a situation for a home. New England was safe, and Davis's children were at school in Cambridge ; so he lived alone in lodgings in Washington, and stuck to his post, only making one short visit home during the whole of the spring and summer, and

until his final detachment from the Bureau of Detail in September.

His associates were those officers with whom he was connected at the department, Bache of the coast survey, Henry of the Smithsonian Institution, General Totten, the chief of engineers, and most particularly, after the organization of the conference, Du Pont. Besides these, there were several private houses which he visited familiarly, for his frequent journeys to Washington before the war had made him intimate in Washington society. As a relaxation from the cares and anxieties of official life he read, for he was always an omnivorous reader, though he says: "When I first came to Washington I was so wearied and dazed with the six or seven hours at the desk, and in the business of the office, that I only opened a book to make use of it as a soporific. In this way I waded slowly through the mud and water of one or two literary narcotics. My evenings were mostly spent in visiting. But as I began to work into the ruts of this new and not agreeable life, the habit of reading began to reassert its influence." Even in the midst of war's alarms, his letters abound in allusions to, and criticisms of, the books he reads.

The letters themselves are fragmentary and disconnected. Although he wrote nearly every day, he was obliged to seize on odd moments in the intervals of business, and he made no effort to tell a continuous story. Still he was a ready writer, and his letters occasionally contain pictures or criticisms of passing events, and, even fragmentary as they are, some of these

sketches throw a light on the times. Moreover, they are characteristic. There are many private and personal allusions which are unsuitable for publication, though his criticisms of men are never unfair. He was generous and chivalrous by nature, and he never measured others by simply a reference to his own standard. A few extracts are given, and it must be premised that they form portions of the letters already quoted in the preceding chapter ; but a separation of subjects has seemed advisable.

May 1st. I reached here Saturday night at half past ten, by the way of Annapolis, a longer and more tedious route than the old one. We stayed long enough in Annapolis for seeing the Academy grounds and troops. The watch fires along the line of road from Annapolis to the Junction and to the capital, the encampments and the multitude of soldiers, had a peculiar effect. Bache and his wife gave me a most cordial welcome. I have not seen enough of the world here to acquire any new ideas about the war or to learn anything. Yesterday I passed the entire day with the commodore [Paulding] ; and to-day I am at the department trying to see through a millstone, and in such a hurry that I have only time to say that I am well.

After this brief note Davis returned to Cambridge to settle his affairs at home, and make preparations for permanent duty in Washington, which he reached again on May 13th.

May 14th. Washington and the District will form the great military camp and centre of operations, and an active campaign will not be begun until the number of troops is considerably augmented. The plan of the campaign is supposed to embrace Harper's Ferry, Norfolk, and Richmond.

The exact number of men here is not known. I have talked with army officers, and think there are between 22,000 and 25,000 men; and in the District 12,000 to 15,000 more. There is a feeling of security *now*, but I learn from every one that the alarm at one time was extreme. It was thought that conquest and famine were imminent, and there was, in truth, the greatest probability that even a small force of resolute men, backed by the secessionists here, would have taken the city with ease. The enemy lost a great chance, a very great chance, one that will not return. I wonder at the supineness of the rebels. It was a great opportunity lost. Bache says they did not move because they could not provision a force of six thousand men. I shall write again to-morrow, and scribble in the greatest hurry.

May 15th. It is the general impression here that Washington will be attacked, but the city is secure. If other occupation is found for the Southern army the attack will not be made. The state of things seems to be this: that neither party is ready for the other yet. The Virginia troops are not ready to take possession of Arlington Heights, and the government wishes to avoid treading on Virginia soil before the election of the 23d instant and furnishing the secessionists with an argument. There is abundant evidence of the existence of a Union feeling in eastern Virginia, increased by the forced contributions, authorized thefts, and violence of war. How much this feeling may be kept under and suppressed remains to be seen. We still hope that secession may be rebuked by the vote of the 23d. It is a sign of the times that a number of horses, saddled and bridled, are standing all day long at the different offices of the War Department.

May 18th (17th?). Since writing yesterday, I have heard the opinion of clever army officers, and think that there is a good deal of uneasiness about Arlington Heights, the possession of which, gained without difficulty by the enemy, would annoy and injure this part of the city, though it would not lead to

the capture of Washington. It is said that neither side is prepared to open the campaign; and particularly that General Scott will wait for greater numbers, and more perfect discipline, before provoking active hostilities. I am glad to see that the rebel force is increased at Harper's Ferry. The position is inside our base of operations, can be cut off and shut up, and employs a good number of the most efficient troops.

May 18th. The longer I stay here, the more I am struck with the unprepared state of things generally. Captain Meigs (now colonel) has told me that Fort Pickens is badly provided with shot and shell, and I know that a thousand of the latter have been supplied by the navy, though they are not yet on their way. I am every day more satisfied that General Scott will proceed with great deliberation; will wait till his troops are more perfectly drilled and have accumulated in greater numbers. A gentleman who dined with him yesterday told me this morning that he (the general) estimated the troops under arms in Virginia at 40,000, very well officered, unequally armed, and with a deficient commissariat. The military policy may be adopted of waiting for an attack and not commencing the war ourselves. A great deal of the strength of Virginia may be expended, for example, on Fort Monroe, which they seem crazy to take, and also in building up, and occupying during the hot weather, the environs of Norfolk. There will no doubt be active movements in the West and on the Mississippi River when the cold weather of the autumn authorizes it, or even before.

May 20th. I witnessed the swearing in of a regiment (German) the other day. The sight was not a grand one. Some thirty refused to take the oath, ten of whom came in afterwards, while the remaining twenty were drummed out amid the hisses, groans, and whistling (*à l'Allemagne*) of their comrades.

May 25th. We have had an exciting time this morning.

Poor Ellsworth's funeral ; an attack on the New Jersey regiment at the Chain Bridge by the Virginians ; and the report of a fight at Sewall's Point. The alarm guns were fired for the first time, and war is actually begun. The Navy Department is well prepared with rifles and revolvers. The bells are now ringing, and it would seem that the alarm continues. The Commodore, Woodhull, and the clerk are loading the muskets (rifles) in the room where I am now writing. . . . The reports thus far are good ; Sewall's Point is said to be captured, and the Virginians are said to be repulsed at Chain Bridge. This is on the bulletin at the War Department, but has yet to be confirmed.

May 28th. Mr. Fox said to me the other day that a private concern would be ruined by conducting business as it is carried on here. It calls for the exercise of all my self-control and discretion to refrain from speaking upon subjects that do not concern me. Don't imagine I tell you all I see, and don't repeat what I tell. The First New Hampshire Regiment arrived last night and was reviewed by the President this morning, — a fine looking regiment, perfectly equipped, with a dozen or more baggage wagons, an ambulance, etc. It is said to be the most perfectly provided of all that have come.

June 16th. Living in Washington one sees some of the peculiar distresses of civil war ; families divided and the different members arrayed against each other in the two armies. There is a young man here from the South whose case is a most melancholy one. His family refuse all intercourse with him ; his mother sends back his letters unopened, and he has now made his last appeal to her by sending his Bible, a present from his mother when he left home, with a final letter. This incident is as touching and striking as the killing of the father by the son, and the reverse, in Henry VI. When I went over to see Fort Seward, the *tête du pont* on the other side of the Long Bridge, I met with a young officer of engi-



neers from South Carolina, who was constructing the fort, and who told me that he had ten uncles in the secession army. To have ten uncles anywhere is remarkable; but to have them drawn up in battle array against one nephew is a rare combination. . . . A great many families in Washington are divided among themselves. . . . I hear a great deal and think a great deal of this distress, and have a sentiment of enduring gratitude for our exemption from this woeful addition to our present troubles. It is better to be all on one side, or all on the other, and not, like poor Cordelia, see before us a divided duty. I am most happy that you are in a place remote from the scenes of war, their pains, agitations, and anxieties. . . . The next point is the Manassas Gap, or Junction, from which we are to hear. It is very evident that we are on the eve of a great event there, and of some important occurrence at Winchester. It is not impossible that McClellan's advance column may have reached Winchester before Johnston. Whichever party gets there first will probably intrench itself; but if *we* are there first, we have the advantage of having made an advance on our intended line of movement; but if Johnston should garrison his forces there, he will only repeat the blunder of Harper's Ferry. If, on the other hand, General Johnston should retreat toward the main line, crossing the Blue Ridge at the Paris Gap for example, and either wait reinforcements from Richmond or join General Beauregard, a big fight would, I suppose, take place somewhere on the rolling country west of Alexandria.<sup>1</sup> I hear that General Beauregard means to strike a blow. It is certain that extreme activity prevails in our vicinity. The intrenchments on the other side from Alexandria, with Chain Bridge, including Arlington Heights, are fortified with heavy artillery (siege guns), the troops about Alexandria are drawn in and massed, the scouts are very active, and General

<sup>1</sup> Considering the events that actually transpired, this is a clever summary of the situation.

Schenck's brigade, comprising two thousand men, moved across the river night before last.

June 18th. Mr. S.<sup>1</sup> returned home last night, to the great joy of his wife and daughter, and to his own satisfaction. He was entirely surprised to find his family safe, and living on such good terms with their neighbors, particularly with the neighbors of different political opinions. Such were the apprehensions inspired in his mind by the rumors and exaggerations of his correspondents that he expected to be arrested and to have his baggage searched at every stopping-place between Boston and Washington. In fact, it is a thing that strikes one very much, the free intercourse of persons whose friends are fighting in the opposing ranks. We are living in constant expectation of some great event, though what it is to be I don't know. We are surrounded by incident, so to speak. The "rumors of war," which constitute one of the evils of a state of war, fill our ears and produce incessant agitations.

June 21st. I had the pleasure to see Tom Motley last night at William Lee's. He and the historian have been in town some days, the latter on public business, being a bearer of dispatches from England. The accounts from that country are a little more satisfactory. But how the English hate broke out at first! It is deep-seated and hearty. Have we got to drink the bitter cup of humiliation and degradation in witnessing the triumph of our enemies in our national ruin? "We will cry to God most high, unto God that performeth all things for us," to save us from this affliction. Motley says that the Southern agents, having the start of us, and making free use of the falsehood which has been their chief instrument in promoting secession, persuaded the British government that the Confederate States had possession of Washington, and that the bonds of union were so entirely dissolved that only the Southern States remained together.

<sup>1</sup> A person whose identity is now lost.

. . . William Lee gave me an account of his introduction of Lothrop Motley to General Scott. They were profuse in their mutual compliments and praises, and the general called for champagne, "green seal," looking, perhaps, upon Motley as his future historian. I heard one or two anecdotes of the general. Speaking of the Ohio troops being led into ambuscade last Tuesday, he said that the commanding officer dumped them down between the batteries like so much dead freight. He said also that he could manage all his generals except General Impatience.

July 13th. Mr. S. and his family leave Washington because he has no means of living here, and is obliged to depend on rich friends for the means of support. He is a protégé of Mr. M., to whom he owes his appointment; and he resigned because Mr. M. resigned, and if Mr. M. had not resigned he would not have resigned. What a queer thing to hold such a relation to another man that he becomes the honor, the law, and the conscience of his hanger-on, or disciple, or admirer! And how worse than stupid to throw himself at his time of life, with his family, on the charity of friends! Strange weakness and infatuation!

July 15th. I should think less of the task of writing if I had anything to write about. The great news of the day, and of history, is the war news, and that you have in the papers better than I can give it. . . . The desperate state of feeling among the Southerners here shows itself in nothing so much as their misrepresentations and exaggerations. They deceive themselves, and are willing to be deceived. A week ago last Friday, that is, eleven days ago, a crazy secessionist told Du Pont that in six days from that day we, the Unionists, would be "whipped out of our boots," and that in sixty days the city of Philadelphia would be laid under contribution; and, moreover, there were one hundred and twenty-five thousand men under Beauregard in Virginia. The gentleman believed all this, and he and his associates live on such hopes.

They tell each other exaggerated stories, magnify little incidents, suppress disagreeable truths, and talk big (to use a vulgar phrase), like frightened children. So far is it from being likely that we are to be "whipped out of our boots" (I wear gaiters), that we are to make the forward movement ourselves to-day or to-morrow. This I tell you because it will be known before my letter reaches you.

July 21st. The office, or bureau, is very quiet on Sundays. The day is a remarkably pleasant one; the air is fresh, yet soft, balmy, and not too warm. The birds are singing in the thick foliage of the yard, where they are never disturbed, and all I see and hear was, a moment ago, in keeping with the stillness of a Sabbath morning. But since I began to write, the rumbling of heavy transportation wagons over the stones of the Avenue has broken the silence of the morning and the hush of nature; and, still further to distract the solemnity of the day, the messenger has just brought up word that the enemy's batteries at Bull Run have been turned, and that fighting is going on there.

July 22d. I wrote the letter that goes by this same mail, but found no opportunity to send it yesterday. I meant to take it to the hotel last evening on my way to the Smithsonian, where I drank tea, but forgot it. The sad news of this morning has made us feel particularly unhappy, because we had received good news last evening. I find it difficult to confine my thoughts to the business of the office. There is the greatest fault-finding and discontent. Every one is a general and a military critic, and every one, as is generally the case in times of misfortune and ill luck, is ready to condemn and to indulge in ill temper. For my own part, I am inclined to think that the present state of feeling is very much exaggerated, and that the results are not so very bad as reported. But the details are discouraging, and the more I hear the more I fear for the end. However, it is useless to sit here giving expression to doubts and hopes and fears

altogether fluctuating, vague, and uncertain. Like Macbeth, I'm sick at heart (Seyton, I say!). If the worst comes to the worst, I am determined to serve in the intrenchments. My hands are not of much use in working, but my head might be in directing. I have more than once spoken to you of my new experience of the meaning of the phrase "rumors of war." The "catching" nature of fear, the idea of *consternation*, are both brought out in this crisis. There is an old croaker here, who, himself a Pennsylvanian, is made one half a secessionist by a Southern wife. He has been in the department this morning, and has reminded me of Edgar Poe's raven. One listens, or thinks he ought to listen, with respect to the words of a man who talks upon matters pertaining to his own profession; but this croaking dog, whose wishes half created his opinions and statements, presented such a picture of the condition of the army, its losses and defeats, as made me want to choke him. . . . It is raining hard, and the gloomy weather adds to the depression occasioned by the melancholy news.

July 23d. Yesterday was a day of the deepest gloom. It was a day that recalled the scenes of history and historical painting, in novels and in the drama. Great excitement prevailed. Notwithstanding the rain, people stood about in groups and talked mysteriously, or listened to some straggler from the other side. Many countenances wore an expression of alarm, all of anxiety. It was a long time before the clerks could get to work; they sat in listless apathy. Woodhull, who was among the most excited, burst out, while I was sitting at the desk writing, into expressions of astonishment at what he called my coolness; though, as there was no danger immediately threatening us, there was no occasion for the exhibition of coolness. He was running round in the pouring rain as if set in motion by springs, and unable to keep still. Such was the alarm that the storm which hung the heavens in black was hailed with delight as an impedi-

ment to the march of the rebels, who, it was feared, would follow up their retreating foes and invade the capital. I shared, of course, in the alarm and depression; but after I had made up my mind to put on my uniform and go into the intrenchments in the event of an attack, I felt better, wrote all the morning and two hours in the evening. . . . This morning the alarm has somewhat subsided, and a sterner feeling has taken its place. I presume that now the necessity for establishing large camps for training, as in Europe, will be recognized, and a sufficient number of troops brought into the field to render all opposition useless. This defeat puts us upon our mettle. If we cannot rise superior to it, if we are not stimulated to greater exertion by it, we are unworthy to succeed. But I feel the strongest assurance that the people are fully equal to the trial to be sustained and the effort to be made.

July 24th. We are having an awful time here in Washington. I have witnessed alarms on board ship, but those were on a small scale. A panic in a great city, and that city the capital of the country, is quite another thing. You know we speak of some people in the common intercourse of life as being desponding, as taking a melancholy view of things, looking on the dark side. But now, for the first time, I understand what an alarmist is; and, next to an incendiary, he is the greatest curse and pest of society in time of war or general calamity. He runs about reciting in the ear of every one whatever he has heard or can invent of horrible, dispiriting, disastrous, unfortunate, and discouraging; and gives to his language additional force and emphasis by winks and shrugs and grimaces and whisperings. Mr. —<sup>1</sup> is one of these men. They are like the persons who delight to tell stories of fearful accidents and dreadful calamities. Mr. — has been keeping everybody who would listen to him in a state of anxiety by alarming statements, duly authenti-

<sup>1</sup> Name suppressed; not a historical personage.

cated, that the enemy is approaching in force, that our army is demoralized and disorganized, and, finally, that the cause is lost. I told him that I was sick and tired of his croaking, and, for my part, would rather die at once than endure the thousand daily deaths he put the victims of his fears to. I seldom have passed a more unpleasant day than this, and I shall be glad when the arrival of more troops and of General McClellan silences the alarmists.

July 25th. I dined with Du Pont at Bache's yesterday, and I did hope when I left the office that I should get rid of "war's alarms," the hopes and fears of war, but the conversation at the dinner-table was upon no other subject; and when I returned home at half past ten o'clock my landlady told me that Mr. So-and-So and Mr. So-and-So had just been in to tell her that the enemy would be here before the morning, and that we should all be carbonadoed and eaten, and plundered and sold for slaves; and this morning Mr. — has begun his croaking as soon as I got to the department. But I hear that the troops who suffered in the battle have been replaced by new regiments; and no anxiety is felt, as far as I can see, by those whose judgment is to be relied upon. Still, I shall not feel easy till more men arrive, and to-day and to-morrow must be days of care and apprehension, founded, in my case, principally on my ignorance of the facts and inability to make up an opinion. If we *are* in danger, the superior officers of the army must be singularly incapable and inefficient. But I think we are not in danger, and I hope soon to eat my meals in peace, and cease to sleep in the affliction of such disagreeable dreams as were occasioned by my drinking a double allowance of *chasse* after coffee, there being both white and red curaçoa on the table last evening.

July 30th. It is quite an exercise of mental discipline to collect my thoughts enough to write to you amid all the distractions of this office. But the effort it costs is a profitable

one, and I do not doubt that I shall experience real benefit from it in some future emergency of life. Every now and then it comes over me with a newer, deeper, and more solemn impression, that we are in the midst of civil war; and, still worse, that the end of that war has been indefinitely postponed, and the conflict rendered more bloody than it would have been, by the recent unfortunate defeat. Last Sunday I heard confidentially a brief explanation of General Scott's plan of the campaign. If he had been allowed to carry it out, it would have been praised by history as wise and successful. The premature movement into which the general was forced by public clamor, acting directly and through the Cabinet, has put things back without doubt. Still, if it has no worse results than the defeat of Bull Run, it will prove nothing more than a mortification, — and a mortification we needed to check our presumption and teach us prudence. *Nullum numen abest, si sit prudentia.* Since General McClellan's arrival, there has been a manifest improvement in certain things, commenced, however, before he came. Immediately after the battle, there were quantities of stragglers about the streets from the disorganized and demoralized regiments, and many of them drunk and dangerous. A stop has been put to this; the stragglers have been, most of them, sent to their regiments, and a provost marshal has been appointed to prevent the liquor-shops from selling to the soldiers. Twenty thousand and more men have come through Baltimore, most of whom have come on to Washington. Still, the apprehension of Johnston's movements has not, I believe, entirely abated. It is a novel and by no means pleasant thing to be on the tiptoe of fearful expectation, always on the watch for the alarm bell. If a gun is heard, the second and third are looked for at the regular interval that sounds the signal to arms. If there is continued firing, people rush to the telegraph office to know if there is an attack on the fortified camp on the other side. We are more quiet now, however.



August 3d. I asked General Totten, in conversation the other evening, why, after all, the advance was made; and his answer was that, to begin with, we felt sure of success, and would have been disappointed if General Johnston had been a jot less enterprising; and then, we could afford to meet with a repulse, and were justified in taking the chance in a case where victory would have had such magnificent results. If the Confederates had been defeated, they could never have made such a demonstration again. They would have dissipated, not, like the witches of Macbeth, into thin air, but into thick air. It was not, however, in the calculations of General Scott, or his council, that they would suffer such an overwhelming repulse, or they never would have risked the capital as they did. General Scott said (as General Totten added) that he was perfectly satisfied with the manner in which the army was commanded, and most of the divisions led, in the field.

August 5th. Our mess has been increased by the addition of Major Barry of the artillery. He has recently returned from Fort Pickens, and has a countenance bronzed by long exposure to the sun and weather. He told me that the horses of his battery had traveled so much in railroad cars and on board ship from port to port, that they would go on board ship or enter a railroad car like men, and that during his last voyage from Fort Pickens they were taken from the stalls and walked about the decks. Prince Napoleon was at the headquarters of General McDowell yesterday, and received from him an explanation of the battle of Bull Run, with the maps. He was very much interested, and passed two hours with the general. . . . I asked Major Barry if the defeat was denied; he laughed and said, by no means. It is evident that there is altogether too much good sense and manliness to attempt to conceal the truth; and there is a healthy moral determination to turn the lesson of loss and humiliation to the best possible account. This is very grand and hopeful.

August 6th. I like my new messmate, Major Barry, very much. He is possessed of great bonhomie and sociability, and being, as he is, at the head of the artillery of the Army of the Potomac, I hear a good deal from him that is interesting. Last night he went over the various forts, fortified camps, and military posts on the right bank of the Potomac, from Alexandria to Harper's Ferry. I have never had so strong a feeling of security as after the recital from him, accompanied by some military details.

I recur incessantly to my new experiences in this most interesting and exciting period, and I think you will be tired of hearing me say how sick I am, heartsick, of the desponding and doubtful, — the Van Twillers of society. Henceforth I shall set them down in my tablets; my soul will take note of them; they have become repulsive to me; I have discovered that they are naturally antipathetic to my inclinations and temper. I won't say anything more about it, but can't you imagine how excessively annoying it must be to be harassed by vague alarms and tormented by unmeaning and indefinite doubts? — "I don't see how things are to end," and "I fear that, after all the fighting is done, we shall be no better off than now," and so forth, and so forth.

History only performs its office when it teaches by example. Yet how few endeavor to interpret the passing events by reflecting upon them some light borrowed from the mirror of history!

On the 18th of September Davis was detached from the Bureau of Detail and from all duties in Washington, and relinquished at the same time the directorship of the "Nautical Almanac," and he was appointed fleet captain and chief of staff of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, under the command of Flag Officer Du Pont. Up to this time the blockade of the whole

Atlantic coast from Chesapeake Bay to the Straits of Florida had been under one command; but a division was now made into two squadrons, and an expedition, already alluded to, was fitted out to operate in accordance with the plans prepared in the conference during the summer, and in this expedition Davis took his place.

He proceeded to New York, where most of the ships for the expedition, and for the new blockading squadron, were preparing for sea, and for the next month he was busily engaged in the equipment and organization of this large force.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PORT ROYAL EXPEDITION

THE Report of the Secretary of the Navy, dated December 2, 1861, contains the following : —

A seizure of some of the important ports on the coast commanded the early and earnest attention of this department. It was found that naval stations and harbors of refuge during the tempestuous seasons would be indispensable if hostilities were to be continued, and the stations thus secured could also be made the points of offensive military operations. Shortly after the attention of the government was drawn to this subject, a board was convened under the auspices of the Navy Department, consisting of Captains Samuel F. Du Pont and Charles H. Davis of the navy, Major John G. Barnard of the army, and Professor Alexander Bache of the coast survey, to whom a thorough investigation of the coast and harbors, their access and defenses, was committed. Several elaborate and valuable reports of great interest, exhibiting in minute detail the position, advantages, and topographical peculiarities of almost every eligible point on the coast, were the results of this important commission.

In view of the data thus presented, two combined naval and military expeditions have already been organized and put in action. Such coöperation and concert of action between the two arms of the public service were indispensable ; for, though the navy alone might assail and capture batteries in some positions, it was not within its province or power to retain or

garrison them. The operations on shore manifestly pertained to the army, and on such occasions, as soon as the military forces were ready for these expeditions, the navy was fully prepared and eager for immediate action.

After some delays, an expedition to Hatteras Inlet, on the coast of North Carolina, where piratical depredations had become extremely annoying, was undertaken. Flag Officer Stringham commanded in person the naval forces on this occasion, and Major-General Butler had command of the small military detachment of about eight hundred men which coöperated with the navy. The expedition was eminently successful in the attack upon and capture of Forts Hatteras and Clark. The entire garrison, under the command of Samuel Barron, recently and for nearly fifty years an officer of the navy, surrendered after sustaining great loss, while not a life was sacrificed nor an individual of the Union forces wounded. . . . The military force was inadequate to follow up this brilliant victory by securing a position upon the mainland, and there propitiating and protecting the loyal feeling which had begun to develop itself in North Carolina.

It was intended that the success at Hatteras should have been followed in September by a more formidable expedition, and the seizure of a more important position farther south. Owing to various causes, independent of the Navy Department or the condition of the navy, this movement was unavoidably postponed until the 29th of October, when a fleet of forty-eight sail, including transports, a larger squadron than ever before assembled under our flag, left Hampton Roads. Captain Samuel F. Du Pont, then recently appointed flag officer, an officer of great skill and experience, and possessing the entire confidence of the department, was selected to command this expedition. In addition to his general professional ability, he had, through careful study and investigation as chairman of the board which had been ordered in June, special qualification and thorough preparation for

the highly important and responsible position assigned to him. Informed of the policy and views of the government in regard to the expedition, prompt to execute its wishes, and having made himself familiar with every eligible port on the southern Atlantic coast, he, as commander of the expedition, was intrusted with the selection, within prescribed limits, of the place where the first assault should be made.

After encountering the severest storm that has visited this coast during the present season, which partially dispersed the squadron, causing the wreck of several of the transports, and compelling even some of the smaller vessels of the navy to put back, the fleet, by the merciful interposition of Providence, was preserved, and appeared before Port Royal, one of the best though neglected harbors on our Southern coast, on the fifth day of November. So soon as the channel could be buoyed out and other preliminary measures accomplished, assaults were made on the well-built and thoroughly armed forts, Beauregard and Walker. Consummate naval strategic skill and the most admirable gunnery were exhibited in the attack, which was of such tremendous effect that General Drayton and the rebel army surrendered their strongholds, fled the coast with precipitation, leaving their property, armament, and papers, while our naval forces took, and still hold, quiet possession of one of the finest harbors on the Atlantic seaboard.

A mere glance at the chart will show that on the southern Atlantic coast of the United States, while the harbors are generally shallow and the shoal water extends some distance off shore, the land itself is cut up into innumerable islands formed by a network of rivers and sounds, which makes it possible to approach the principal seaports, in vessels of light draught, from points of entrance from the ocean quite remote from the cities

themselves. A vessel can reach Savannah, for instance, by entering the Saint Mary's River at Fernandina, eighty miles to the southward; or can approach Charleston by entering at North Edisto and passing through the Stono River and Walloo Creek. Such a geographical condition enhanced the difficulty of maintaining an effective blockade of the coast, a difficulty still further increased by the neighborhood of the Bahama Islands, the possession of a virtually hostile power, which became the entrepôt of the profitable business of blockade-running. Here the ships from England could enter freely and refit, and from this point contraband cargoes could be dispatched in light-draught vessels, which could slip into any one of the numerous inlets of the coast, in water too shallow to permit the close approach of a vessel of war.

The possession and control of these inland waters would not only effectually close the principal avenues for this traffic, but would be also a great advantage from a purely military point of view. By operations in these waters it became possible, with the active coöperation of land and naval forces, to turn the defenses of the seaports themselves, as was actually done in the case of Fort Pulaski at the mouth of the Savannah River, and this control offered the true strategic advantage for the approach and capture of the Southern cities. It has been shown in a previous chapter that such operations were proposed by the mixed conference in July; and it has also been shown why it was probably impossible to carry out these plans. Had the battle of Bull Run been a victory instead of a defeat,

it might have been possible to send a sufficient army into Georgia, and to have carried on a regular invasion, with the reduction of the principal cities, simultaneously with the great struggle for the Mississippi River which began in 1861 and only ended with the surrender of Vicksburg and Port Hudson in July, 1863. But even then the operations would have to be carried on upon a vast scale, and it is probably a fortunate thing that not only the people of the North, but their leaders, failed to comprehend in 1861 the magnitude of the task before them.

The Port Royal Expedition, therefore, is an isolated event, and not one of a regular series forming a campaign. Its results bore directly upon the blockade, and in this respect were important. Flag Officer Du Pont attempted with the means at his disposal, and with the by no means harmonious coöperation of a totally inadequate land force, to carry out the original plans of the conference; and the occupation of Port Royal Bay was immediately followed by operations in inland waters, the capture of Tybee Island, Fort Pulaski, Fernandina, Jacksonville, and other important points. The expedition consisted of forty-eight ships, of which only fifteen were men-of-war, the rest being transports and supply vessels, and some of these small and unseaworthy craft, including even river ferry-boats; but this did not include a fleet of twenty-five colliers which sailed on the day previous to the departure of the expedition. The army was commanded by General Thomas W. Sherman.

The battle took place on November 7th. Fort



Walker, on Hilton Head, the south side of Port Royal Bay, was a regularly constructed work, mounting in all twenty-three guns of various calibres; and on the opposite shore, at Bay Point, was Fort Beauregard, mounting twenty guns. The width of the bay between the forts was more than two miles. Included in the defenses of Port Royal was a flotilla of gunboats under Commodore Tatnall, formerly of the United States Navy.

As has been said, the selection of the point of assault was left to Du Pont. The Navy Department had rather favored Fernandina, but the convincing argument was the depth of water at Port Royal, which permitted the largest vessels of the navy to enter; and thus the primary object of the expedition, a port of refuge and depot of supplies for the blockading squadron, was better gained at Port Royal than at any other harbor on the coast.

In the attack<sup>1</sup> the order of battle was in a single column, headed by the flagship *Wabash*, the other ships, in order, being the *Susquehanna*, *Mohican*, *Seminole*, *Pawnee*, *Unadilla*, *Ottawa*, *Paulina*, and the sailing sloop *Vandalia*, towed by the *Isaac Smith*. A flanking squadron, consisting of the gunboats *Bienville*, *Seneca*, *Curlew*, *Penguin*, and *Augusta*, was intended to engage the flotilla under Tatnall. The plan of attack was, to stand in with the main squadron in mid-channel, engaging Fort Beauregard first, and turning above the forts. This manœuvre enabled the

<sup>1</sup> See Admiral Porter's spirited description of this action, *Naval History of the Civil War*, chap. vi.

ships to take the more powerfully armed Fort Walker on its upper and weakest flank. In passing Fort Walker the engines were slowed to just sufficient speed to preserve the order of battle, and Fort Walker engaged at close range, and the ships turned in succession below the forts and repeated the manœuvre, engaging Fort Walker with the port battery. The flanking line also engaged Fort Beauregard at the same time that the main squadron was occupied with Fort Walker ; and a division of the gunboats also enfiladed the latter from above, for Commodore Tatnall had discreetly withdrawn his flotilla into Skull Creek, and took no part in the battle. At the first broadside from the ships the fort replied with great spirit, but as the ships began to get the range they pitched shell from their nine and eleven inch guns into the midst of the gunners ; and when the squadron swept by Fort Walker from the north, after turning above the forts for the second time, the fire was withering. Again the ships turned into the harbor, and delivered their broadsides at even closer range. This was too much for the Confederates, who fled helter-skelter from their works. Commander John Rodgers was sent ashore and hoisted the flag over Fort Walker ; and the commander of Fort Beauregard, seeing Fort Walker abandoned, also evacuated his post. Beauregard had not been considered as an important point of attack, but had been engaged at long range as the main column passed.

The direct results of this victory were good. It came at a time when the Union arms had been generally unsuccessful, and it inspired confidence at the North. It

also had a good moral effect abroad, and it served as a lesson to the navy as to what wooden ships could do against fortifications, and set the pace, so to speak, for future naval operations in the same line. Its beneficial effect in tightening the bands of the blockade has already been noted. This first naval achievement of the war has been overshadowed by the later actions in the Gulf, perhaps for the reason already given, that it was an isolated event; but the action itself is worth study, because it affords a striking and almost unique example of the capture of fortifications by ships.<sup>1</sup> The tactics of the battle, which were Davis's own, were masterly; and yet, as will presently appear, the order of attack was changed at the very last moment. The day before the fight, a reconnoissance was made in force to draw the full fire of the forts; and from the information thus gained a change of plan resulted, which was not communicated to the fleet until it went into action. This shows the perfect discipline of the fleet, and the confidence of the flag officer in himself and in his command. The army took no part whatever in the attack, but remained outside in its transports, in a state of some anxiety and suspense, until the flag over Fort Walker announced the victory of the ships. It would be premature at this point to trace the ulterior results of this action; and with this brief preamble the narrative of the expedition may now be given in Davis's own language. The letters are addressed to his wife:—

<sup>1</sup> This chapter was written before the war with Spain. There is a striking similarity in the method of attack between Commodore Dewey's action in Manila Bay and the battle of Port Royal.

U. S. S. *Wabash*, Oct. 18, 1861. We are entering Hampton Roads, and I must prepare a single line to let you know, not our arrival, for that you will learn by telegraph, but that I am well, and that we have had a splendid voyage. We have had a profitable one, too; the time has been passed in all sorts of practice, and in the exercise of day and night signals. This will give us a good start on our next trip.

You shall hear from me again by the next mail, and by every mail while we are here, though I shall not have much to say. You will be very anxious to know if we have come to any decision about our *locus in quo*. We have not, yet, and shall not till we have had an opportunity to consult General Sherman, though the final decision of the question rests with the commodore, who is the commander in chief, and ranks with a major-general. But General S. is entitled to be called into council. You will not be left in doubt, you may be assured, if the matter is determined before leaving here, and you may rely also on my adherence to my first plan, unless I should be fully and fairly convinced of the expediency of an alteration. The whole subject will be well weighed.

Hampton Roads, Oct. 20th. Our transports are still at Annapolis; not the first one has come down yet. We are glad to be so far in advance of them; and not sorry to be delayed, the weather being rough and easterly.

Hampton Roads, Oct. 21st. It has been blowing very fresh all day, and the weather has been boisterous. In the worst of the storm, Newport News was threatened with an attack, and we sent up two gunboats by signal. Of our squadron, two men-of-war belonging to the navy proper, and four or five of the purchased steamers, great and small, have arrived to-day. Since dark, several steamers have anchored near us, and it is probable they belong to the fleet of transports.

Hampton Roads, Oct. 24th. Last night we had a long council of the generals and ourselves, lasting way into the small hours, in which much was discussed and nothing decided. This

morning the council was renewed at nine o'clock. We are grievously disappointed in Mr. Boutelle's<sup>1</sup> not arriving. It was distinctly understood by Du Pont and myself that Mr. Boutelle was to come here post-haste and leave the *Vixen* to follow. More than a week has elapsed and he is not here. The truth is, no doubt, that Bache did not want him to go without the *Vixen*, in order that he might have a coast survey vessel in the affair. We have decided in council to wait till Saturday morning. But as to-day is pleasant, it is a pity to lose it.

Hampton Roads, Oct. 25th. According to present appearances, this will not be the last letter you will receive from Hampton Roads. The wind went round the wrong way, and, by a rule that never fails in our climate, the easterly storms never clear up entirely until the wind goes round by the south to west. If we go to sea to-morrow we shall commit a folly knowingly, and against the best judgment of the fleet; and yet we may go, for it is a not uncommon fate of such expeditions to be driven by the force of public expectation, and the impatience of public feeling, to move against the opinions and wishes of its leaders. I speak from no selfish motive, for the bad weather would not affect this ship. The small, overloaded and overcrowded steamers, low in the water, would be the chief sufferers. I trust better counsels will prevail.

General Sherman came on board this afternoon, and was received with a salute. His staff accompanied him; and now we are full, having five in the cabin. I felt obliged to offer to give up my room to General Sherman, and Rodgers<sup>2</sup> very generously insisted upon giving up his. But Du Pont would not consent to either proposition. I must confess, or, as the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. C. O. Boutelle, assistant of the coast survey, detailed to assist in the hydrographic work of the squadron, on account of his particular local acquaintance with the Southern coast.

<sup>2</sup> Captain, afterwards Rear Admiral Christopher Raymond Perry Rodgers, a lifelong friend of Davis, commanded the *Wabash*.

phrase is, I am free to confess, that I was very glad to have my own offer rejected, which is a little piece of selfishness in me. I know, however, that the sofa we put the general on is as good as a bed, — is, in fact, made for a bed, with a sacking bottom, and that otherwise he is more comfortable here than on board his steamer, where he was not only cabin'd, as here, but cribbed also, and confined; whereas here he is sofa'd and unconfined, — bound in to no saucy doubts and fears.

Saturday, half past one. Mr. Boutelle arrived on board this morning before I was dressed entirely, and the whole morning was spent in all sorts of consultations, business, worry, fret, and interruption.

Hampton Roads, Oct. 26th. Before closing my last note I told you that Mr. Boutelle had arrived. He was very welcome; nothing could have supplied the loss of his knowledge of the ground. He made the triangulation, the groundwork of the survey, of the whole coast of South Carolina, and he possesses a taste for topographical details, and a faculty of observing, and, so to speak, of interpreting them, which are truly wonderful. He lives with us in the cabin, so there are now six of us.

The first thing after breakfast was to send for the other generals and have another council of war. The charts and maps are reproduced, including many new ones from Washington. The generals talked over the matter with Mr. Boutelle, while Du Pont and I wrote without cessation, preparing the final orders, and particularly the secret orders communicating the place of rendezvous in the event of separating.

To return to the council: Mr. Boutelle answered all their questions and removed all their scruples, and they came heartily into the new plan of operations. He satisfied me upon the only point about which I felt anxious; that is, the easy and certain entrance of this ship into the place.<sup>1</sup> The presence of this ship makes whatever we undertake much

<sup>1</sup> Port Royal Bay.

more secure, and is a more influential fact with me than any other. And this fact, added to the other two I mentioned in one of my former notes, — first, that the whole fleet has a harbor at once, beyond the reach of the batteries, and, second, that the points may be assailed one by one, — decides my opinion. I suppose the matter may be considered as now settled and determined. You will, no doubt, be interested in knowing what my impression is of the military commander of the expedition, now that I have been two days living with him, and seen him in council. He strikes me as clever, candid, and clear-minded, but not as being a man with an uncommon grasp, of a heroic cast of mind, or of an equable or well-controlled temper. His reputation in the army is that of an excellent soldier, and a very excitable and passionate man. Among the generals are two I have known before, and been associated with, — General Stevens, who as Major Stevens was assistant in charge of the coast survey office, and who was on the commission on Cape Fear River of which I was a member; and General Wright, who was, when Captain Wright, on the commission on the St. John's River, Florida, of which I was senior member by appointment from General Totten.

Now that everything is ready, we are very impatient to be off. The weather looked promising this morning, and Du Pont ordered the signal for getting up steam to be made to the whole fleet; but the wind drew back to the eastward again and the fog set in, and the signal for preparation was annulled. To-night it is raining, and although we are disappointed, we are glad not to be at sea with our ferry-boats and little tugs in a dark, rainy night, when it would be impossible to observe any order of sailing, and when collisions would be almost unavoidable.

Hampton Roads, October 26th. The number of vessels in our whole fleet is seventy-five; but of these a large number are sailing vessels loaded with coal and heavy stores, not required for immediate use, most of which belong to the

army. We send down, under a special convoy, all but three or four of the largest and most important of these freight vessels ; leaving about forty-eight to form our own fleet, consisting exclusively of steamships except the three just mentioned, which are to be towed. This harbor of Hampton Roads looks like a great city, so numerous are the lights. It is frequently observed that so many American vessels, ready for sea, were never seen together, for you must remember that Commodore Goldsborough is here in the *Minnesota*, with some of his squadron, men-of-war, storeships, steam tugs, etc.

Sunday morning, October 27th. It is blowing a gale from the north-northeast. To go to sea now would be to condemn to certain loss some of our small vessels, and to expose the troops and horses in the transports to great suffering. Du Pont bears the delay like a man ; but General Sherman frets under it very much, and has been talking about landing the troops on account of water.

These delays are the trials of our patience and temper ; a part of the anxieties of our condition. They are to be met and borne with fortitude and good temper.

Monday morning. We are doomed to the severest trial of delay and defeated expectation. This morning it is bitter cold, the north wind strong, and the weather utterly unfit for small vessels. One of our small craft came in from New York last evening, having barely, and wonderfully, escaped destruction. Her escape is the merest wonder. She is knocked to pieces, and will require large repairs. This is bad for us. Every day's delay creates some new difficulty, and adds, probably, to the amount of work to be done when we reach our destination.

Two o'clock. Our great apprehension has been about water, of which we consume nineteen thousand gallons a day. After endless talk and anxiety about it, it is discovered that two of the steamers alone can make forty thousand gallons a day. Whence, therefore, the tears ?



We shall probably sail to-morrow morning at five o'clock.

Flagship *Wabash* (at sea), October 31st. I told you in my letter by the pilot that we sailed very early Tuesday morning. It took some time for fifty ships to get under way, especially as they were to move in an established order which brought them all, in point of speed, to a level with the dullest. It was well we started early. The greater part of the day was consumed in getting to sea, and in forming the lines and columns that constituted the order of sailing. I had prepared a circular, and a plan of the order. Fifty copies of the last were distributed throughout the fleet, and each captain was distinctly informed of his position and enjoined to keep it. The captains of the men-of-war, and the heads of the columns (leading ships), were furnished with the circular, or sailing directions.

The idea of the order of sailing is to place the long line abreast of the men-of-war in front, to command way, and range the transports in three columns ahead, in the rear of the line abreast, and protected by two men-of-war on each flank and two in the rear, to cover both sides and the rear, and bring in the stragglers. I was most agreeably surprised to see the aptness and accuracy with which the transports took their several positions in line. By evening every one was in his place, as near, at least, as was to be expected, and the columns were distinctly formed with their leaders ahead. In the afternoon we fell in with the *Bienville*, one of the finest of the new steamers, commanded by a fine fellow, Commander Steedman,<sup>1</sup> belonging to our squadron, but not quite ready when we sailed. She was towing the *Brandywine*, an old frigate converted into a storeship, and designed to lie in Hampton Roads for the convenience of the squadron. We telegraphed to Steedman where to find his orders, and to use dispatch.

This was very satisfactory, the *Bienville* being a very ser-

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards Rear Admiral Charles Steedman.

viceable vessel on many accounts, and her commander a great friend of Du Pont's.

The appearance of the fleet at night was as impressive as it was uncommon. I have generally pursued my solitary way across the ocean, and never known what it was to be in company with more than two ships at a time, and that seldom. A light at night in the open sea has rather been regarded as an object of apprehension, particularly if the night was dark, because, before finding out the direction in which the stranger was standing, there was a fear of running foul of him.<sup>1</sup> But now, at night, the sea is covered with lights at every point of the horizon, on both sides and astern. Ahead there are none, because this ship is the centre of the leading line. But viewing the scene from the quarter-deck, the absence of lights in the direction of the ship's head is not felt. Steamers carry several lights each, of which the one on the port side is red and that on the starboard side green. Variety was not or is not wanting, therefore, to add to the glitter and effect of the show. We seem to be in the midst of a populous community, and yet we do not lose the feeling of being at sea. I am more than charmed with the sight. I think of similar expeditions that have figured in history; of great fleets that have followed the poop-lantern of distinguished admirals; and I see now, as I never did before, how these looked in reality which we have only known about in story. One great contrast presents itself to the mind, and that is, the vast superiority of this fleet over those of preceding times in the use of steam. I now, for the first time in my life, feel a sympathy I never knew before with the delays and tedious detentions caused by contrary winds and calms, in the management of great expeditions and the cruises of great fleets. What, for example, must Nelson

<sup>1</sup> *Running lights*, as at present used and required at sea, were not adopted until about 1860. Previous to that time ships carried a white light on the bowsprit cap; and in squadron the flagship carried a poop-lantern.

have suffered, when he was searching for the French fleet in the Mediterranean, or when he followed it to the West Indies and back, from opposing winds, from gales that obliged him to lie to, and from calms? Patience is more necessary at sea than elsewhere.

The morning of Wednesday (the 30th) broke very fair. The sky was as clear as summer, the wind moderate and bracing, and the sea smooth. But in the course of the day the aspect of things changed unfavorably. Our course carried us off shore, and the sea became gradually more rough as the distance from the land increased. The weather would have been regarded as altogether favorable but for the smaller vessels. They, however, began to complain; and one of the ferry-boats, which seemed to be making excellent way and breasting the seas nobly in the morning, gave out and hoisted her flag upside down. We sent a vessel to her assistance, and before night set in she and several other of the smallest vessels of the fleet had disappeared under the charge of one of our side-wheel men-of-war, very well suited for such a purpose. The great body of the fleet, however, remained; and again, after the darkness came on, I gave myself up to the admiration of the scene, most beautiful in itself, and eloquent with suggestion and association. But the night proved to be one of great and unnecessary anxiety. We passed that dread of seamen, Hatteras, and, though the time was in all respects as propitious as the heart of man could desire, the proceeding was threatened with disaster. We had signaled to the fleet before sunset to sound frequently during the night. Rodgers navigated this ship with great judgment: after feeling the projecting *talon* of the Cape with the lead, we passed over into deep water and hauled in to the westward. At quarter before three I was called and informed that a transport had thrown up ten rockets, and at half past three one of the fleet made signal that she was aground. The first of the signals was a general one of distress. We could render no assist-

ance. This great, lumbering ship would not go to windward, where the transport was, with her merely auxiliary power of steam. She must be left, whatever her distress might be, to her more light-footed companions. The last signal had the effect on me which practice is said to have upon unwilling students of arithmetic, — “it made me mad.” We were then thirteen miles from the outer shoal, and the statement was absurd. It came from one of our own vessels, and I called for an explanation, but none was made. The truth was, that the ground-swell being, as it almost always is on this broken ground, very heavy, the captain got alarmed, which was excusable enough.

To finish this part of our story, it was afterwards reported to us (the next afternoon) that two or three of the fleet had struck on the shoal. If true, it was the result of the grossest carelessness. But I incline to the opinion now, that they were deceived by the swell, which was really terrible, and occasionally let the ship down with such force that she seemed to have struck the ground, instead of the sea at the bottom of the hollow of the wave.

The next day, Thursday, the date at the head of this journal, the weather was beautiful, warm, balmy, with light winds, and the smooth surface of a summer’s sea.

Yesterday we counted forty-two sail in sight after our tugs and ferry-boats parted company. This morning the number was reduced to thirty-six, but afterwards went up to forty as the day advanced, and we waited for their coming up.

Thursday was a day never to be forgotten. I told Du Pont it was the weather I had bargained for, in answer to his good-naturedly twitting me with the bad weather, or sea, of yesterday. The established lines of sailing were kept; the quiet sea was filled with the life of our great fleet. Signals, telegraphic communications, and occasional hails conveyed the orders, or communicated the news of the day. It was impossible to leave the deck. The scene was enchanting; and as I

looked abroad on the ocean covered with our ships of war and transports, the pride of the navy and the strength of the army, I participated in the glow and ardor and elation of heart inspired, no doubt, by the Armada of Spain, and attributed and attributable to the commanders of all similar expeditions (I sympathize with the commander of this), and which proves sometimes to be the pride that goeth before a fall. In the pride of his heart,

“He counted them at break of day, —

But when the sun set, where were they ?”

Nov. 3d. If I experienced any of the puffing-up of the spirit to which I have alluded, and which the philosophical teachings of my reflections condemn, the change brought by Friday morning (the 1st) was suited to rebuke it. The first thing I was told was that it rained, and that the wind had hauled round to the eastward, which sounded the knell of good weather ; the second, that the *Isaac Smith* (one of our purchased war steamers) had hoisted a signal of distress ; the third, that the smallpox had broken out on board the *Vanderbilt*, one of the largest and most crowded of the transports.

With regard to the last calamity, we had nothing to do but recommend the isolation of the case and trust to its not spreading. The trouble of the *Isaac Smith* proceeded from a collision by which her starboard bow above the deck was stove in. We sent her the means of repairing the injury. Just at this time fortune smiled upon us by the rejoining of the *Bien-ville*, which was a most acceptable addition to our force. She had carried her tow into Hampton Roads, and hurried off to catch up with us before we reached Port Royal. But the worst of our trials was the weather. The wind and sea increased alarmingly for the small craft ; and the sky put on that appearance which an intelligent judge of the weather on our coast never mistakes. We knew that we were going to have a southeaster, a gale of short duration, seldom last-

ing more than six hours at its height, and much less violent than our hurricanes, but still very violent in its crisis, accompanied by a sea dangerous to small vessels, and with a heavy, blinding rain that makes things appear worse than they really are. Before night the *Isaac Smith* asked, by signal, for help. We sent the *Atlantic* and *Florida* to her assistance; and to-day the former informs us that she stayed by her till ten o'clock, and left her to the *Florida*, who did not leave her. We have not yet seen either of them, and don't know how the poor *Isaac Smith* got through the night. But I have gone in advance of my tale to dispose of this special case. About two o'clock in the day, all the smaller vessels of the fleet began to "lie by," as the phrase is, which means taking the most advantageous position for meeting the gale without regard to the course,—the *Vixen*, Bache's vessel, among them. Seeing they were distressed by the weather, we made a general signal to heave to, hoping thereby to keep company. But as the wind and sea rose, the sternmost vessels, and those on the weather quarter, dropped out of sight. By dark our number was sadly reduced, and about ten o'clock, when the storm raged the loudest, we entertained the most anxious fears for the safety of one or two of the weakest and least stanch of our little companions, and to these fears was added the dread of collision. On board this great ship, such an accident was little alarming on our account. But if we had fallen on board one of the transports she must inevitably have gone to the bottom.

The violence of the wind, the height of the sea, the storm of rain, and the pitchy darkness made it impossible to avoid collision, or to render assistance after it had occurred. Thank God, we escaped this horror; we have yet to hear whether all were equally fortunate.

Our own situation during the night had been made uncomfortable by our shipping a heavy sea in Du Pont's stern port, which he had carelessly left open, and by a little forcing of

the water through the uncalked ports. In truth we had not thought so much of a gale as a battle, and were not prepared for the former. Most of the passengers passed an uncomfortable night, through anxiety of mind as well as the violent motion of the ship; and even the most experienced went to bed late and slept watching.

Saturday morning (Nov. 2d) opened with the usual appearance of a storm at sea, — an angry sky, rain, wind, and a general appearance of discomfort on board and of desolation on the dreary waste of waters; wet decks, darkness below, and great motion. But the most impressive feature of the scene was the solitude. We had sailed from our port with a fleet of fifty ships; the ocean was alive with our numbers; and now we were scattered in a storm, and of our companions only eight could be discerned with difficulty and rarely, as the rain and heavy mist abated and cleared away at short and infrequent intervals.

We passed a grave and thoughtful day. In the course of it, the *Mayflower*, a small river steamer never designed to encounter the perils of the open ocean, hoisted her ensign union down; it was evident from her conduct that she was abandoned to despair. She was drifting like a log towards the Gulf Stream, where she must have foundered, in her helpless condition, unless picked up. We ran down to her; but this ship is too clumsy and slow, and too little under control with her steam, to play round a little frail thing like the *Mayflower* in a heavy sea. At this juncture the *Atlantic*, Captain Eldridge, came to the rescue. She is one of the gigantic steamers of the Collins Line. Eldridge handled her like a boat, with wonderful boldness and address; he managed to get a hawser on board and took her in tow.

Du Pont thanked Eldridge by signal to-day for this act, and for his general activity in the fleet, a compliment he has well deserved. In the afternoon the *Coatzacoalcos* came within hail and told us that she leaked badly, and must run

in shore under the lee of the land and out of the heavy sea. We sent the *Augusta*, one of our few remaining comrades and men-of-war, to stay by and take care of her. We had the satisfaction to learn from the *Atlantic*, the *Bienville*, the *Coatzacoalcos*, and the *Augusta* during Friday and Saturday that no vessel had been injured, or stranded on Hatteras Shoals; that a tug and a ferry-boat had anchored in Hatteras Cove, and that the other tug and ferry-boat had gone back to Hampton Roads. So no one of these smallest and weakest vessels has, probably, been exposed to the southeast gale.

About half past two Saturday morning the wind shifted suddenly to the westward, from which quarter it blew with great strength all day. Last night it moderated. When we made a signal in the course of the night to change the course, there was only one single answer. Our old friend Ammen<sup>1</sup> stuck to us in all weathers, and only parted company this morning, when Du Pont sent him to Charleston to bring along Lardner in the *Susquehanna*.

To-day, Sunday, the sky and sea have been growing milder, and to-night (it is now 9.40 P. M.) the weather is most beautiful. There is not a cloud visible. We are standing in for Port Royal, and will anchor soon outside the bar. To-morrow we shall begin an examination of the channels. I have some terrible stories to tell of the disasters among the lighter vessels of the squadron. Some of the men-of-war have not joined. But I must stop here, for all is in the bustle and hurry of getting ready for action.

*Vixen, Port Royal Entrance.*

MY DEAR DU PONT, — All the vessels of war can come in, under the *Curlew's* pilotage, as far as we are, except the *Wabash* and *Susquehanna*, and perhaps you had better send them. I am in sight of the enemy's works and shipping.

<sup>1</sup> Later Rear Admiral Daniel Ammen; commanded the *Seneca*, gun-boat. He had served with Davis on the coast survey.



All goes well. I am writing on the extremity of a vibrating cylindrical-shaped concern.

You can send in the transports this afternoon.

Yours affectionately,

CHAS. DAVIS.

Flagship *Wabash*, Port Royal Bay, Nov. 5th. We ran aground going in towards the batteries. We were obliged to anchor and give up the attempt, on account of the hour's being so late. We make the attack to-morrow morning after an early breakfast.

Nov. 8th. Let me begin by saying that yesterday, after breakfast, we got under way and went in, in a prescribed order, the plan of which, after I had made it out with study, was communicated to the captains of the squadron, who were summoned on board for that purpose. We tripped the anchor at ten minutes after eight, and sent on shore to take possession of the Hilton Head batteries, to which we had devoted our principal attention (at half past two). Having cause to think that the enemy had abandoned also his fortifications on the Bay Point side, Du Pont detached a squadron of four vessels to take a position in the river above Bay Point, to take possession if the enemy should have fled, and to prevent the destruction of public property. Du Pont's official report<sup>1</sup> will give a most accurate account of the affair, and as I am consulted in the composition of it I need not repeat here the details it contains, as I am compelled to write in great haste. The excitement and gratification resulting from this victory are greater to-day than yesterday evening, when we were fairly worn out with the day's work. All the captains, or most of them, came on board last evening and drank a glass of wine on the event, and they, with some of the army people, stayed till we were glad to have them go. After they had

<sup>1</sup> For the official report and accompanying documents, see the *Report of the Secretary of the Navy for the Year 1861*, Appendix.

gone, Du Pont, Raymond, and John Rodgers and myself sat down in the after cabin and discussed the incidents of the day, a most interesting discussion, as you may imagine.

The first shot was fired at about twenty-six minutes after nine, and the American flag was hoisted on the sacred soil of South Carolina about half past two. The engagement was not continuous, in consequence of the plan on which it was conducted, which I shall explain by and by. While it did last, and while we were in front of the Hilton Head batteries, the chief object of attack, the firing was very rapid on both sides.

You must endeavor to picture to yourself the whole scene, and a most important and interesting feature of it was the presence of some fourteen thousand of our countrymen on board the twenty transports and troop ships anchored four or five miles below, who were safe and undisturbed spectators of the battle. Their feelings must have been most wrought upon by the events of the day, on which their own fortunes hung, as well as ours. We were told that the sight of the American flag over the batteries was greeted by tears, rather than cheers, so deep were the emotions of the spectators.

I must go back a little into the story of events. Beginning on Tuesday, the 5th, we considered our bringing this ship into the roadstead, over the bar, as a bold thing. No ship of the size had attempted it before, and we employed only a day in verifying the channel and placing the buoys, the old ones having been removed by the rebels. The *Wabash* led the way. The bar is two miles long; we knew that we had only three feet to spare in several places. The success of our enterprise depended on our getting the ship in; and, though there was no hesitation about making the attempt, it cost us some anxiety.

We anchored in safety in the upper roadstead, about four miles below the batteries, at about ten o'clock, and proceeded at once to clear the ship for action. But to make the prepa-

rations complete and get rid of our guests occupied us until a late hour. One of the most necessary of these preparations was to place a buoy on the end of the shoal which we had to turn going into the upper harbor. The buoy was put down a little too low, and got ashore very luckily for us, for the day was nearly spent, and a night attack, I am now satisfied, would have been attended with confusion. The squadron had not been long enough together to move in sufficient harmony for a night attack, — a dangerous thing, except where there is very perfect discipline and coöperation.

So we dropped back to our old berths and determined to wait till morning. Du Pont took this, as he has every other disappointment, with the greatest coolness and patience. His equanimity is remarkable.

The 6th was a fair, bright day, without a cloud, and wholly propitious, in every respect but one, to our undertaking. It blew a gale of wind, and, to make it as bad as possible, the wind and tide were in the same direction. In a professional view, there was no doubt, there could be no doubt, that the day was very unfavorable to us, and that to engage on such a day was to give the rebels a great advantage. Still, all on board felt the moral pressure upon us, — the force of public expectation, — the imputation that delay might possibly proceed from an excess of prudence, and the impatience of our countrymen who were to be released from their prisons, in which they had already been cooped up three weeks. We knew they were murmuring.

But after all, as I said while in consultation, would we engage under these unfavorable circumstances, if it were not for this moral pressure; would we think of it; and are we justified in acting against our professional judgment, unanimous, too, in obedience to other people's opinions about matters they don't understand? Wise counsels prevailed, and we postponed the attack till the next day.

In the evening General Sherman and his brigadiers came

on board, the former in a state of mind bordering on despair. The ship *Ocean Express*, containing all his heavy ordnance and almost all his field ammunition, had not arrived, and he had given her up for lost; and he was in great doubt what to do, even if the forts were silenced and his landing was secured. He had no great guns. But Du Pont comforted him with the promise of the upper battery of this ship if the *Ocean Express* did not appear.

You must make it a point to get a "Herald." One of its reporters<sup>1</sup> has been posted by us very fully, and probably you will hear a great deal more from him than I ever said or knew.

I shall make it a point to send you a plan of the battle, the order and positions of which, and the mode of entering action, are mine; and I am rather pleased with them. You need attach no importance to newspaper sketches.

Do not think that I am forgetful of my duty and gratitude to God for his great mercy to us. I read immediately after the action the collect of thanksgiving after victory, as I did the prayer before battle on the eve of the engagement.

Port Royal, Nov. 10th. The *Bienville*, which takes home the news of our success and the mails, has just left. I wish I could be with you when the news arrives! What a relief from painful anxieties, from harassing fears! All the more so that you have no doubt heard, as we have seen in the Southern papers, that we have suffered a repulse, — a good lie for a moment's self-deception, and for an excuse for a little bar-room indulgence.

What they called a repulse was either the interchange of a few shots at long range between the gunboats and the rebel steamers on Monday evening, when the gunboats and lighter transports entered, and before this ship was in the harbor; or it was the reconnoissance of Tuesday morning, the object

<sup>1</sup> Adam Badeau represented the *Herald* as special correspondent with the expedition.

of which was to draw the fire of all the batteries, to ascertain their positions, and, as near as possible, their force. It seems to me that we of the North, as a general thing, differ from the people of the South in this respect, particularly, that we deal more fairly with our own souls. We do not try to persuade ourselves that a defeat is a victory, or to call a reconnoissance a repulse. But the mention of this reconnoissance brings me to the connecting link of the narration I broke off at the end of my last letter. It was made in force, as the expression is; that is, with a sufficient display of force to invite an attack, and induce the enemy to show his strength and positions. He would suppose an attack was designed when it was not.

Our part of the affair was well conducted, but the enemy fired at once, just as we wished him to do, instead of holding his fire and tempting the ships too near the batteries. The information we obtained that morning, and other circumstances I shall mention, decided our plan of attack. I have already told you that we made every preparation for an attack on Tuesday afternoon, got under way, and were prevented from going in by getting ashore. I have spoken, too, of the gale of Wednesday, and the consequent postponement of the affair. (I am very much afraid that in writing in this desultory way I shall repeat myself.)

It now seems to me providential that we were prevented from going in when we first intended, for the moment I woke up Thursday morning, before I had fairly got my eyes open, it occurred to me that while the direct approach to Fort Walker (Hilton Head) had the advantage of avoiding the fire of Beauregard (Bay Point), leaving us to reserve all our force and all our fire for the former, — an advantage I had perhaps thought too much of, — yet that I had overlooked another advantage, which, on reflection, I felt convinced ought not to be thrown away; and that was the advantage arising from making an approach to Fort Walker from the north,

on which side we could enfilade the water-faces of the battery, and encounter the fort at the beginning, on its weakest flank. To be sure, we had to pass Fort Beauregard, and begin the day with an unnecessary engagement that would contribute nothing to the main object of the day's work; and if I had known the existence and position of that venomous rifled eighty-pounder on the salient of Fort Beauregard, to the fire of which we were exposed as we advanced, and, still more, if I had known the rapidity and accuracy with which it was to be served, I should have indulged in a little more reflection perhaps. Every shot from that pestilential devil, which was, I imagine, directed by a navy officer (resigned), either struck us or went within forty feet of the bridge on which Du Pont, the Rodgerses (John and Raymond), the first lieutenant (Corbin), and myself were standing. It was evidently aimed, according to the Southern custom, at the officers, and aimed, I have no doubt, by some one of our old brother officers turned rebel.

I went to Du Pont's stateroom without waiting to dress, and communicated my change in the plan of attack, to which he consented immediately. He left the whole of these arrangements to me.

The delay had enabled us to complete some details of preparation before omitted. We took a leisurely breakfast at seven (Du Pont, happily, takes all things leisurely), and got under way at eight. And here I stop to assist Du Pont in writing the official detailed report of the battle, which you must consider a part of this letter to you, though you will see it first in the newspapers probably.

I have passed the greater part of the day and evening in drawing up the report and directing the preparation of a plan. I am surprised to see how much more strongly the idea of a *plan* is impressed upon my mind than on the minds of others. It really seemed to me as if the notion of a carefully matured plan of action had not been distinctly entertained by any one

but myself. A very imperfect view, prepared by one of the lieutenants, who confessed to me afterwards that he did not know that there was any fixed plan of attack, excited great admiration. I was quite disgusted to find that the thought and study bestowed on the battle beforehand had been so little appreciated.

I will try to send you the rough draught of that part of the report in which the order of battle and plan of attack are treated. In the mean time I will mention some little circumstances now in my thoughts. On the way down, it was a matter of discussion and consideration with us whether it was most advisable for this ship to stand off at long shot, as was necessarily done at Hatteras on account of the shoal ground, and make use of the *two* largest guns only, and try, as at Hatteras, the effect of a bombardment of two days' duration, or whether we should come fairly up to the question, and engage the battery at the shortest range, that of the five-second fuses. Du Pont, the two Rodgerses, and myself agreed entirely that the best mode of fighting in a heavy-armed ship like this, throwing shells almost exclusively, with a really formidable battery, was to come simply to the point, and to depend upon the destructive agency, and the terror inspired by it, of a shower of iron hail, or iron *hell*, dropped in the briefest time and on one spot.<sup>1</sup> The very bursting of the shell constitutes one of its chief horrors, and we knew we could rely upon the quick firing and good aim of a well-trained crew of marine artillerists, and upon a set of officers of very remarkable merit, take them altogether. We determined, therefore, to put this big ship close to the battery ; and I may say to you again that it was a most happy thought in me to bring her

<sup>1</sup> Volume of fire with shell-guns, a factor of such momentous importance in modern armaments, had hardly at that time been formulated as a distinct advantage. The tendency of the times was to diminish the volume of fire by increasing the calibre of guns and reducing their number, depending rather on the effects of single shots.

north-about, so that we might approach the fort on Hilton Head, Fort Walker, with the least possible exposure, and arrive in front of its square open line of fire fresh and ready for the business of the day.

Fortunately, in passing Beauregard, we had not lost a man, though we had been repeatedly hit.

November 12th. We are all going to Beaufort this morning. The terror inspired by the victory has spread all over the neighborhood. Beaufort is deserted by the white population, and the negroes are, or were, committing the wildest havoc. The commodore has sent up and put a stop to the destruction, and taken temporary possession of the town. We are going up this morning to look at things, and General Sherman goes with us. The *Coatzacoalcos* goes North to-day, and I shall put this in the letter-bag before I leave the ship. The transports will now be constantly returning, and frequent opportunities will occur of writing.

A word regarding the principal officers of the expedition may close this somewhat protracted chapter. Du Pont and Davis were intimate friends. The friendship began on board the *Ontario* in 1829, and never flagged. Although their service in the navy had not brought them together on board ship, their meetings were frequent on shore, and their correspondence was uninterrupted. They were very near each other in age. Du Pont's seniority in rank was the result of having entered the navy at a very early age, while Davis had entered rather late. Davis's duties were those of captain of the fleet and chief-of-staff, and they were not only multifarious, but brought him into the closest and most confidential relations with the commander-in-chief. This, together with the strong inti-



macy already existing, produced a relation between the two which is rare in the navy, or indeed in any military organization ; but there existed in the old service a feeling of comradeship and brotherhood among the officers very much stronger than anything of the sort now prevailing. It was a true *esprit de corps*. The lines of official etiquette existed in full force, but were not so tightly drawn as at present ; for officers were not bound down by a narrow and inflexible system of regulations, — a system which has been pernicious in its results, for while it has capriciously abrogated custom, which should be a “universally required law of a practical and active service,” it has pinned all down to one standard of mind, and has set officers to watching one another to detect trivial errors in contravention of regulations too innumerable to be borne in mind, and so minute as to be querulous and vexatious. The most cordial, intimate, and spontaneous intercourse could exist between the two senior officers of the Port Royal Expedition, working together to attain a great end, and free from mutual jealousy and mistrust, while at the same time the true spirit of official courtesy and etiquette was strictly observed.

The two Rodgerses, Raymond and John, were cousins, and both rose to high distinction in the navy. They were younger than Du Pont and Davis, but shared in the cordial intimacy which existed in the cabin of the *Wabash*. Raymond commanded the ship, and John served as a volunteer aide to the commander-in-chief. It was a peculiar and striking combination which united these four men in one ship, and a very

unusual one from a naval point of view. The gentleman already alluded to as serving with the expedition as special correspondent has left an impression of the cabin mess of the *Wabash* which it may not be out of place to quote : —

Among the naval people attached to this joint expedition were also many destined to achieve distinction and high rank. Du Pont, who commanded ; Charles H. Davis, the fleet captain ; C. R. P. Rodgers, in command of the flagship, — all had their quarters on [*sic*] the great wooden frigate, the *Wabash*, and, in my double capacity of correspondent and volunteer aide-de-camp, I saw them often, and with a certain degree of freedom. Three finer specimens of naval gentlemen I have never had the fortune to meet. The dignity and courtesy of their bearing, the honorable tone of their conversation, the brilliancy of their attainments, the quality of their talent, and of course the gallantry of their conduct, were all distinguished. I was in their company under peculiar circumstances, — when they were going into battle for the capture of Hilton Head, when they were preparing or discussing other movements in advance, and when they made known to me what they were willing should be communicated to the press, — and I was always impressed in an unusual degree with the elevated tone of their minds and behavior. Their comments on the enemy were never disparaging or degrading ; they were as firm as any men in their devotion to the service and the cause ; some of them had broken with near relatives and given up lifelong friendships for the sake of the Union, but they had not, for that, less than a due appreciation either of the ability or the motives of the Southerners. They suffered for their country, South as well as North, but were determined to do their part to reunite it. And, though they were as enthusiastic in their profession as any men I have seen, they were not the braggarts that some soldiers and

sailors on both sides have unfortunately been. They were cautious, in their reports, to claim nothing that they had not achieved, and to take nothing from the credit that belonged to their comrades in the army and navy. When I wrote my letters for the Northern press I went to them for information, and thus had especial opportunity to observe this peculiarity of high-bred naval officers. It left a permanent recollection with me ; and the picture of these three sailors, as they walked the deck of the *Wabash* before a battle, or discussed a movement in the captain's cabin, or cautioned me afterwards not to claim for them more than their deserts, is one of the most vivid and agreeable that I retain of the war.

## CHAPTER X

### PORT ROYAL — *continued*

AFTER the action at Hilton Head the navy took possession of Fort Walker, and on the following morning of Fort Beauregard at Bay Point; and the transports and troop ships, which had been waiting in the inner roads, entered the harbor, the soldiers on board cheering the ships vociferously as they passed along the line of men-of-war at anchor. There were some shocking and some ludicrous scenes, according to the vicissitudes and contrasts of war, exhibited in the abandoned forts; for the Confederates had retreated precipitately, leaving many of their wounded behind them, and all of their property, both public and personal. Their precipitate retreat had the effect of spreading terror throughout the surrounding country, and had it been possible to follow up this signal victory by an invasion, before the enemy had time to recover from the first panic and to gather his forces, great results might have followed; for the battle at Hilton Head was not only an overwhelming victory, but it was also a complete surprise to the South, which had counted on the strength of its coast defenses as amply sufficient to keep the Northern squadrons at bay. Port Royal was the first instance in which the war was brought home to the South, and that, too, in the very hotbed of secession.

The first care of the commander-in-chief was to take possession of the conquered territory and turn it over to the army, and to stop the plundering by the slaves, which was going on with recklessness and excess, and seemed to be inspired more by hate than by lust of gain. It was the opinion of the Union leaders that the population had fled more in terror of their slaves than of the invader. This was a section of the richest cotton country of the South, and the blacks of the plantations, representing the lowest and most debased type of negro savage, became turbulent and unruly with the knowledge of the defeat of their masters, who had taught them to believe that they were invincible.

There is perhaps no instance in history, none certainly in our own times, more striking than this, of the unreasoning terror inspired by the sudden appearance of an enemy in the midst of a community which believed itself to be perfectly secure and remote from the theatre of war. The town of Beaufort, fourteen miles above Hilton Head on the Port Royal River, and the surrounding plantations were entirely deserted by the white population, leaving only the blacks, who were committing the wildest excesses. The people took nothing with them in their flight, and did not even lock the doors of their houses. In describing the occupation of Beaufort, Davis says: "When we landed we found a scene of desolation and ruin, in some places almost too painful to dwell upon. The only people we saw were the negroes, standing at the corners or wandering through the streets, looking on in amazement. The absence of population in a compact, fresh, well-built town was in itself a most melancholy sight."

The occupation of Port Royal Bay had the immediate effect, so far as Davis himself was concerned, of greatly increasing the duties of the fleet captain. In the organization of the blockade, and the depot at Port Royal, and the multifarious cares and duties of the headquarters of the squadron, the details were his part of the work. Every captain and every subordinate in authority comes to the chief-of-staff with his wants; and as their wants are numerous, and as each one's wants are to him the most pressing and important affair of the day, the chief-of-staff of a large squadron is besieged from morning to night with letters, applications, and requisitions, all of which must be met and attended to. Du Pont began at once with the reorganization of the blockade and the exploration and reconnoissance of the surrounding inland waters, pushing his light gunboats into every river and inlet, and feeling the enemy's position wherever there were forts or batteries, and coöperating with the army, as far as it was possible to do so, in its operations for advance and occupation. These movements were discussed in council, but Davis took no active part in them except in two or three instances. In the midst of these duties, however, his mind dwelt on the possibilities of the situation, and the great advantages that might be gained by vigorously following up the present success. His views and plans are given here, not because they have any great historical value, for history deals with events which happen rather than with such as might have happened, but because the whole subject was afterwards made a matter of discussion. The navy did its whole

share in this occupation, and it is not within the scope of this story to discuss the movements of the army; but it is a perfectly legitimate undertaking to show that the person of whom these pages principally treat had a clear enough conception of the situation to know what might and could be done.

Port Royal, December 2, 1861. You can have formed some idea, from what I have already told you, of the effect of the capture of this place upon the surrounding country. And yet, as we have advanced and as time has elapsed, the effect has become more apparent and striking.

One of the first thoughts, and indeed the very pet idea of Mr. Fox, has been to stop up some of the Southern harbors, and we were to commence with Savannah. I had always a special disgust for this business; and we had had it before the commission in Washington. At one time Bache and I made a favorable report upon the sinking of vessels on the outer bar of Savannah River, or Tybee Entrance, as it is called, but we subsequently withdrew the report. The maggot, however, had got into Fox's brain. I think the chief charm of the thing to him was the opportunity to purchase vessels, for which he has a *penchant* that amounts almost to a mania. Soon after we were established here, John Rodgers, who has special charge of this service, was sent down to reconnoitre. The result of his examination, which was conducted with great caution and extended through two or three days, was to ascertain that Tybee Island had been abandoned. You must look on the map or chart, when you will perceive that Tybee Island bounds the mouth of Savannah River on one side, and the channel runs close to it, and is commanded by it. This constitutes an advance post for Savannah, as Morris Island does for Charleston; and the voluntary abandonment of it through the terror inspired by the bombardment here

is a most unexpected point of our victory. We have now corked up Savannah like a bottle, and in a little while General Sherman will send troops there, and we shall hold the Island.

In the same manner, the fortifications at St. Helena Sound (the next to us on the north, as Savannah is on the south) have been deserted and the guns destroyed. Our vessels have been up the Coosaw and Ashepoo rivers some distance. Otter Island will be occupied immediately, and this seems an advance of twenty-five miles towards Charleston.

This Sound of St. Helena is as large a sheet of water as the one we are in, though interrupted by shoal ground, and not, like this, possessed by a free and open navigation. But you will see by the map that very large rivers enter into it, and that the whole region is intersected by water communications. The country is as fruitful and abounding and valuable as it is in this vicinity. These unlooked-for possessions really occasion an *embarras de richesses*; they suspend or divert our fixed plans of operations, and present new fields of enterprise. . . .

It seems to me incredible that the enemy . . . should have yielded up such an important position as Tybee Island without a blow. With this post in our possession, the fall of Fort Pulaski is only a question of time. When Pulaski falls, Savannah is at our mercy, but just now all my thoughts turn towards Charleston. If you look even on an ordinary map of South Carolina, you can trace in fine lines a water communication from St. Helena Sound to the Ashley River, and you will observe that South Edisto, North Edisto, and Stono rivers and inlets afford the means of lateral support and supply to an army moving towards Charleston, by vessels of the navy coöperating from the sea, which is wholly in our possession. The ground, intersected by watercourses (natural) in several directions, is low, sandy, or marshy, and wooded more or less, but thickly so only in a few spots.



The army, by following these watercourses more or less strictly, would have the support of armed boats and vessels of light draught (armed with our fatal shell and shrapnel, against which men in masses can never be made to stand a second time), and would also possess the easy means of transporting the provisions and munitions of war. I have not a military education, nor a military turn of mind, but it requires no special military knowledge or genius to perceive, 1st. That Charleston is the proper object of a campaign, because it is the commercial capital of the State and the principal seat of its wealth; because it is a stronghold; because it is a strategic point for other operations to be conducted from as a centre or base; because it is a seaport (for this see history, *passim*). 2d. That the support and co-operation by sea would afford the same help, and secure the same facility and rapidity of movement here, as they did to Wellington in Portugal, and to our friend, with seventeen consonants and no vowel in his name, who crossed the Balkan in 1828. 3d. That this is through a thinly peopled and not very accessible district except from the sea. 4th. Since the distance is short and the season healthy, *now* is the time to do it. 5th. That no preparation is made for us here, for our wise friends in Charleston only shut one door of their house, against which they have invited us to break our heads instead of entering the other. They might find the comedy of Calderon, "Casa con dos puertas mala es de guardar," converted into a tragedy.

The force at General Sherman's command was, probably, insufficient to carry out such a plan; but with immediate reënforcements from home, and by seizing the opportunity afforded in the terror inspired by the success at Hilton Head, and with the support of the gunboats and armed boats of the fleet, Charleston

could probably have been taken. At all events, by an immediate and well-planned advance on the part of the army and navy simultaneously, without allowing the enemy time to draw breath, Savannah could have been seized by a *coup de main*. But General Sherman was not the man to seize such an opportunity. He wasted precious time in cautious and uncertain advances, in strengthening unimportant points, and occupying places of no strategic value, such as Beaufort, and principally in complaints. And after his retirement from the command he wasted still more time in explanations. His force was composed entirely of volunteer regiments, in which he had no confidence, and he was continually finding fault with his condition. However, as his operations amounted to nothing serious, and have no direct connection with the subject, the discussion of possible plans and lost opportunities need not be pursued.

Surrounded, as he felt himself to be, by opportunities of something great and decisive, Davis was set to do a piece of work totally repugnant to his instincts as an officer, and at direct variance with the great plans which he knew were at least plausible, — the sinking of the stone fleet on Charleston bar, to block up the entrance of the harbor, which, had it been possible to realize his own conception, should rather have been left wide open. The stone fleet, as it was popularly called, was a fleet of old worn-out ships, mostly purchased from the New Bedford whale fleet, loaded deeply with stone, which were to be towed into position on the bar, and there scuttled and sunk, in order to

prevent the ingress of blockade-runners. As the bar was beyond the range of the enemy's batteries, the operation involved trifling risk, and the whole conception of employing such a means for such an object represented the strategy of the Navy Department, for which Davis has generally received the credit. The last time he had been at Charleston was when, as a member of the harbor commission, he had planned the improvement of the harbor and the deepening of the channel.

Port Royal, December 6th. Raymond Rodgers returned this morning from an examination of Warsaw Sound, by which it is discovered that the fortifications on the island (Tybee) are abandoned and nearly destroyed, the guns having been removed first. Thus, from the first shake of the tree at this place, have fallen St. Helena, Tybee, and Warsaw, all the richest fruit. This Warsaw, which you will see on the map, is a second entrance to Savannah, and almost as good as the river mouth.

We have been very lucky in the terror and dismay we have inspired, and if we had the necessary means at our disposal we should probably be in possession of the entire coast of Georgia, from Savannah River to St. Mary's, before the beginning of the next year. I mean that *we*, the *navy*, should. But the recent advance of Rodgers shows that, if the general commanding were a man of vigor and genius, we would be in the city of Savannah in a fortnight. It is a great opportunity, but I fear it will be lost. . . . He is constantly, in our presence, finding fault with the volunteers, disparaging his means. This is not the tone of a strong man. His soldiers, such as they are, constitute the material with which he is to work. If they are not good soldiers, let him make them better. General Scott fought the battle of Lundy's Lane

with volunteers.<sup>1</sup> . . . What I said to you before I still think, — that the most intelligent and capable of the negroes will be employed as factors or agents between us and the common slaves. One of the bright, well-informed people is the steward of the Pulaski Hotel at Savannah. According to his story, everybody was running from Savannah, and his master among the rest was preparing to move and take his servants into the country. He did not wish to go there, and, like good Gobbo, did not scorn running with his heels. He is now General Viele's major-domo. He told the general that, the morning after the action, Commodore Tatnall came down to a late breakfast at the Pulaski Hotel, where there were still some ladies lingering. He began to give an account of the fight, and to describe the handling of the fleet, of which he spoke in terms of great admiration; but, before he got far, the emotions excited by the narrative overcame him, and he burst into tears and left the room. . . . If the officers of the army and navy had not resigned, there would have been no rebellion, — or none of importance. They were, or made themselves, the ready and convenient tools of the politicians, and that gave the rebellion force and spirit. I may finish this page with mentioning that several of the Southern papers have spoken of our fight as "grandly planned and executed." The "Charleston Mercury," —

"That very enemy, and the tongue of loss,  
Cried fame and honor on him."

I hope I have not quoted that before. I have had it in my mind, and may have dropped it.

December 11th. We gave a very pleasant dinner the other day to the generals, all but Sherman, who was sick. We

<sup>1</sup> It is justice to General Sherman to note that, though not a great general, he served through the war with credit as a division commander, lost a leg at Port Hudson, was promoted in the regular service for gallantry, and retired as a major-general.

endeavor to preserve the most harmonious relations with the officers of the army, regulars and volunteers, and have thus far succeeded. But I am surprised to see how many disturbing influences are in operation to endanger the harmony between the two services. It requires a great deal of good sense, which is another word for Christian charity, to avoid petty contentions between subordinates. We have our swaggerers here, as in Mrs. Quickly's time, and like our hostess, cannot abide them. They try to make trouble. Then, I am sorry to say, more attention is paid than I think should be to the statements of newspaper correspondents, some of whom, as I know, with the best intentions, and with the most sincere desire to tell the truth and shame the Devil, are perpetually giving offense by drawing the lines of distinction too broad, or not drawing them broad enough, by splitting hairs too fine, or not splitting them at all. My philosophy is very much puzzled on this question of the writers and artists. I have not yet, as Professor Henry says, made out my theory of the case. Some of them are clever and well educated, — some vulgar, — and although they have become an integral part of society, and one of its constituent elements, they are not yet sufficiently advanced in character, manners, and responsibility to be entitled to full recognition.

I go to Charleston to-morrow to sink the stone fleet on Charleston bar and close the channel.

December 17th. I did not think I should have time to write again before returning from Charleston, where, as I told you in the last page of my letter by the *Atlantic*, I am bound to put down the vessels laden with stone, or the stone fleet as it is called. This is a disagreeable duty, and one of the last I should have selected. I always considered this mode of interrupting commerce as liable to great objections, and as of doubtful success. But I have facilities for doing it greater than I could have expected. Besides the steamers of war, there will be three transport steamers to

assist in bringing and placing them (the ships). My fleet will consist of sixteen or seventeen old vessels laden with stone; the men-of-war off Charleston now, added to which there will be the *Mohican*, *Pocahontas*, and *Ottawa* that accompany me, and the *Pawnee* and *Seneca* that follow me; and lastly and finally there will be the three transports, *videlicet*, the *Philadelphia*, the *Ericsson*, and the *Cahawba*, in the last of which I shall go. She is a handy steamer with a clever captain and light draught, and I can use her in placing the vessels. I do not go near any batteries on the land, I believe, or if there are any on that part of Morris Island which is to be approached, my position will be out of range of their guns. There are armed tugs and steamers at Charleston, but the force I carry with me will keep them at a respectful distance.

I have settled in my own mind the proper course of action in sinking the vessels, and the principles on which it rests — have laid down my plan of proceeding and communicated it to my subordinates. And that, you know, is half the battle with me. To know what I am to do, and how I am to do it, must be settled in my mind by a process of reflection and reasoning, before I can give myself fully and wholly up to action. I am so constituted, as you are aware, that the thinking must be done first, and done (whether well or ill, at least) to my own satisfaction before the acting begins.

Davis performed this service and returned to Port Royal on December 20th, just in time to escape a severe northeast storm, which would have seriously interfered with his operations on Charleston bar, and the next movement in which he took an active part was a reconnaissance in force in Warsaw Sound, in which he commanded.

Port Royal, January 20, 1862. We have got up another

expedition to Warsaw, and are only waiting for a change of weather to carry it out. It is a joint affair, and I command the naval part, and, as far as this part or arm is concerned, I approve of it — in fact, suggested it. It is a reconnoissance in force that may lead to important results. But as a joint operation I heartily disapprove of it. Twenty-four hundred men are embarked in transports (in which they have been all this wet, cold weather — quite as well off perhaps as in their cold tents), and when I went to see General Wright who is to command them, I found that he had no plan of operations whatever. The next day he came on board to see me, and passed several hours with me, and I found that the best information he had of the ground rendered it doubtful whether he could even land his men. In this case it will be the old story of the king of France, with a change of numbers merely. I should like to see a modification of the plan now, but cannot bring it about. You may be comforted with the assurance that I know what I mean to attempt myself ; but it surprises and annoys me that General Sherman should send General Wright on this service without any preconceived project. Wright is one of the cleverest fellows in the world ; he is an old acquaintance ; we were together on the commission on St. John's River, in the year '51, was it ?

Without a map or diagram, it would be impossible to follow the course of this expedition, whose prime object was a reconnoissance, and if possible, to cut off communication between the city of Savannah and its outermost defense, Fort Pulaski, situated on an island almost at the mouth of the Savannah River. To the southward and eastward of this fort, and forming the southernmost boundary of the river's mouth, lies Tybee Island, which as has already been seen, had been abandoned by the enemy, and its defenses destroyed. Tybee

Island was already occupied by a part of General Sherman's force ; and another part held Turtle and Jones islands on the northern shore of the Savannah River. The watercourses surrounding these islands had been explored and sounded to a certain extent, and there were negroes at the service of the fleet who were skillful local pilots and knew the depths in most of these channels.

As finally arranged the plan was that John Rodgers with two gunboats should advance toward the Savannah River through the channels forming the northern boundaries of Turtle and Jones islands, while Davis, with the main body of six gunboats and the transports containing the troops, should enter from Warsaw Sound and pass through Freeborn Cut to the Savannah River. This would bring the two together at the same point in the river, several miles above Fort Pulaski.

Davis sailed from Port Royal on the 26th and anchored the same night at the entrance of Warsaw Sound. The next morning two companies of infantry were taken on board the gunboats, which advanced up Freeborn Cut, leaving the transports with the main body of the troops in Warsaw Sound. The course of the gunboats carried them within range of Fort Pulaski, visible across the intervening marshes, but there were no guns mounted on that side, and although great efforts were made in the fort to get one into position, it was not done until after the gunboats had passed out of range. The latter continued to advance in the Cut, proceeding in close order, and keeping a lookout for masked batteries or sharpshooters, until they were stopped by



obstructions in the form of a double row of piles across the channel. Here they were forced to anchor, and the companies of infantry were landed to scout, and boats were sent into the neighboring creeks leading toward Savannah River, while Commander Ammen of the *Seneca* went off with a boat to cut the telegraph wire between Savannah and Fort Pulaski.

In the afternoon John Rodgers made his appearance in Wright River, on the other side of the Savannah, and an attempt was made to communicate with him by signal. At about sundown the enemy's squadron under Commodore Tatnall came down the Savannah River, and anchored at the mouth of the Cut in which Davis's squadron was lying, the line of obstructions being, of course, between them. The two squadrons lay in this position until after dark, and Davis rather expected a night attack. He was powerless to move, except in retreat, but he knew that Tatnall could be reinforced with troops from the batteries about Savannah, and that a combined night attack might place him in an awkward position. He therefore kept watch under arms, and pushed his scouts out toward the enemy's defenses. But the night passed without incident, and at daylight it was discovered that Tatnall had disappeared. Exploring parties were now sent out in various directions to examine the neighboring country and water-courses, and the positions of the enemy's batteries were thus ascertained. At about eleven o'clock Tatnall's squadron again made its appearance in the Savannah River, five gunboats, with hulks in tow, which they left at the mouth of the Cut, and attempted to cross

Davis's line of fire. In the engagement which followed the enemy's squadron scattered, three of them running on toward Pulaski, and the other two, one of which was Tatnall's own vessel badly crippled, making back toward Savannah. John Rodgers, who had lain at the mouth of Wright River all night, took part in this action. Davis says: "The last of the steamers that came up came quite alone. She had a hulk on each side of her carrying the guns and constituting the batteries of which she was herself the motive power. Incumbered in this way she passed very slowly before our fire, which she returned in the most gallant manner. Her captain was a plucky fellow."

Having accomplished the main object of the naval demonstration, a reconnoissance, and being unable to proceed on account of the obstructions, there was nothing for it but to return; and in order to avoid the fire from Pulaski, for which the fort was better prepared than when the gunboats entered the creek, the squadron got under way at four o'clock in the morning and passed the fort while it was still dark. After communicating with the transports in Warsaw Sound, the gunboats returned to Port Royal.

An incident of this expedition is related as follows:—

A curious and painful event took place this morning. The paymaster of the *Isaac Smith* (one of the gunboats which participated in the expedition to Warsaw Sound) died early of consumption. The last few hours of this slow, lingering disease were creeping away yesterday during the engagement. This complaint generally gives its victim ample notice to spend his latest breath at home. In his case the solemn

moments of final preparation were disturbed by the roar and jar of heavy artillery, and the shouts of applause that followed every successful shot.

Comment on this expedition, as far as the naval part of it is concerned, is unnecessary. It was an unimportant event, accompanied by no very exciting incident, and followed by no very important result. It was a naval reconnoissance and demonstration, nothing more, such as took place constantly during the war wherever our gunboats were operating in inland waters. But it affords a curious illustration of the futility of a combined movement when authority is divided. There were, doubtless, many similar cases during the war; but it is difficult to understand why twenty-four hundred men in transports, under an independent command, should have been carried from Port Royal to Warsaw Sound, and then brought back again. For the transports could not enter Freeborn Cut, and, excepting the two companies which Davis took along, and which were useful as skirmishers, the whole body might have better stayed in Port Royal. The force employed was unnecessary for a reconnoissance, and inadequate for a serious demonstration; the opportunity for an advance on Savannah had been lost. The enemy had gathered his forces and strengthened his defenses, and the whole army at General Sherman's disposal could not now effect what might have been done with a handful properly led, if the naval success at Hilton Head had been immediately followed up.

Davis had been promoted by seniority to the rank of captain, then the highest grade in the navy, on the

15th of November, 1861, only a few days after the action at Hilton Head; and on February 10, 1862, he was detached from his duties as chief-of-staff of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron with orders to report in person at the Navy Department in Washington. There was much speculation as to the meaning of this order, not unmixed with apprehension that he might be wanted for his old place in the Bureau of Detail; but he heard from reliable sources that it was the intention of the department to give him a flag, to which his rank now entitled him. It must be remembered that, previous to the creation of admirals in our navy, our squadrons were commanded by captains with the honorary title of commodore, until within a few years of the breaking out of the war, when a law was adopted creating the temporary rank of flag officer, and entitling captains in command of squadrons to wear a rear admiral's flag, and to accept and require the dignities and privileges of an admiral's rank, in every particular except in name.<sup>1</sup> This change had been made because the commodore's broad pennant placed our commanders abroad at a disadvantage in relation to foreign flag officers. It was a concession rather to the dignity of the country than to the privilege of the individual: but a flag was the natural ambition of every captain, especially in time of war; and Davis learned from Porter, who

<sup>1</sup> This law has never been repealed, and it has been the invariable custom, up to the past year (1898), to confer acting flag rank upon officers of inferior grades appointed to the command of squadrons. Commodore George Dewey, appointed to command the China station in January, 1898, was the first officer to whom this honor had ever been denied since its authorization by law.

touched at Port Royal with the mortar flotilla on his way to the Gulf, and who had just come from Washington, that it was the intention of the department that he should relieve Commodore McKean, who had asked to be retired from the command of the East Gulf Blockading Squadron, with the *San Jacinto* as flagship.

Davis remained with the squadron long enough to take part in the capture of Fernandina. The respect for our ships due to the action at Hilton Head was still so great that Fernandina fell, without firing a gun, on March 2d, and Davis hastened home in the first transport which sailed, carrying with him Du Pont's dispatches announcing this latest success of the squadron. In the midst of the preparations for Fernandina, and in anticipation of an immediate return to the North, Davis wrote : —

February 20th. We are now making our final preparations, and will be off on Saturday. The weather is remarkably fine, and the interruption has been so long and steady that we promise ourselves a good number of pleasant days. I do not now regret the delay, for it has led to a change in the mode of attack, which strikes us all as very good, and very likely in itself to insure success, if we do not encounter unexpected obstacles. We have more information about Fernandina than we had about Port Royal, and yet we have not so much as we ought to have. The general said to me that he thought we were making an unnecessary amount of preparation ; this was when I read him the list of vessels we are to take. But, so far as it depends upon myself, there shall be no needless risk run. I would not expose this cause, which is the cause of my country, to useless hazard, any more than I would the life of a parent or of a child. If we succeed we shall do a great thing. The whole peninsula of Florida will

be cut off, several valuable sources of communication with the external world, and with each other, will be taken from the rebels, and the whole Atlantic coast of the seceding States will (with the exception of a few points either easily taken or easily guarded) be in our possession. Our success will be another terrible blow upon those who have introduced into a national paradise,

“calm region once,  
And full of peace, now tost and turbulent,”

war and all its attendant evils,

“high passions, anger, hate,  
Mistrust, suspicion, discord.”

How fortunate and timely, too, our triumphs at Roanoke and Fort Henry! That the latter victory, taking place in the very heart of the continent, should have been achieved by the navy alone is quite a feather in our cap, and will add very much to the reputation of the navy, and, I hope, prevent Congress from taking any great amount from our pay, — at least while we are fighting the battles of the country.<sup>1</sup>

NAVY DEPARTMENT, April 1, 1862.

MY DEAR DU PONT, — I have been in a constant whirl ever since I got home, and am now leading a sort of dreamy existence, being in what the philosophers call a state of unstable equilibrium. What I am to do is as uncertain as it can be made by its dependency on events beyond my own or Mr. Welles's control.

But before I come to that, I must tell you of one of two little incidents of my arrival in Washington.

I passed up Chesapeake Bay on the 9th, the eventful Sunday when the fight took place between the *Monitor* and *Merrimac*. As I went by the Eastern Channel, hardly within signal distance of the ships in Hampton Roads, I had no idea

<sup>1</sup> A bill to reduce the pay of naval officers, at all times a popular measure, was then pending in Congress.

of what was going on. But I was so much struck with the firing as to inquire the cause of it from a river steamer, the captain of which told me that it was target practice, principally with the great guns on the Rip-Raps. I did not land in Baltimore till after the last morning train (noonday) had left. I was obliged, therefore, to wait till the four o'clock train. I sent a telegram, however, at once to the Secretary, and with it went the good news of the result of the engagement of Sunday. William, who met me at the cars, told me that the report of our successes was very cheering to the department, and came at a happy moment. In Baltimore I gave the news to the "American," and ordered some copies to be sent to you. Did you receive them?

It was dark when I got to Mr. Welles's house, where he was impatiently waiting for me. He took me over to the department, where Mr. Faxon and the reporters, apprised of my coming, were waiting to get the reports.

I read your report out loud there, and it was very well received. Two copies had been made and corrected on the passage home, so that I had three copies to give to the news agents, who were delighted when they found they were relieved from the labor of making copies for themselves.

From the Navy Department Mr. Welles carried me to the President's, where there were several of the heads of departments and one or two visitors. Here I read your dispatch again, and was frequently interrupted in the reading by comment and inquiries, which evinced the interest of the listeners. . . .

I stayed at the White House an hour, and Mr. Welles walked halfway to my hotel with me. The affairs at Hampton Roads, and some irrepressible anxieties about the Gulf, had made the Secretary quite desponding. He poured out his troubles and apprehensions to me with an open and unburdened heart; and I was touched with his saying at the end of every sentence, or series of remarks, "Oh, if you

and Du Pont were only there I should have no fears about the result, — Du Pont and Foote and yourself enjoy our perfect confidence.”

This idea was expressed in different ways — and very frequently — in the course of the evening. Even at this late period I find that the action of Port Royal is the *handsomest* thing of the war. This has been said to me over and over again, in Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. The manner in which you have carried everything before you on your station; the completeness of your operations; the consummation of plans now known to have been parts of a grand project deliberately formed before leaving the United States; and, above all, that greatest of military virtues, success, — have given you a reputation in the country for sagacity, enterprise, and wisdom far beyond anything you can think of. This reputation has been increased by the reports of persons who have seen you in Port Royal, and among others my nephew, James Peirce, and by Mr. Pierce, the government agent, who has spoken of you, in his letters, in terms of exalted praise. If I could think of anything *mortifying* to say to you, I should certainly say it, in order to counteract the effect of these sugar-plums on your naval constitution. But I am compelled to add to them by congratulating you on the great success of your movements since my departure, — on the possession of Jacksonville and St. Augustine's. . . . Give my most affectionate love to my dear Rodgers, . . . and give him my most cordial congratulations on the part he has taken (the conspicuous part) in the restoration of Florida to her allegiance. I have told Fox that he must make an admiral of Rodgers. I am told that you are to have another vote of thanks for Florida, and are to head the admirals' list.

I send you a copy of the new navy bill by Captain Mulhany (*Bienville*). I suppose you would like to have me tell you something about it and about the department. What an



unreasonable creature you are! Have I not written you twelve pages, and do I not hate to write as I hate original sin? But I have something to tell you, and will write soon again. Remember me to Dr. Clymer. . . . Remember me to Corbin, to Barnes, to Gulick (his relief will go out in the *Rhode Island*), and, most of all, to Mr. Preston,<sup>1</sup> for whom I have an affectionate regard.

Remember me, in short, to all my old shipmates, and to the steward and the boys.

Ever your faithful and affectionate friend,

CHAS. DAVIS.

NAVY DEPARTMENT, April 9, 1862.

MY DEAR DU PONT, — I am writing this letter from my old place (not exactly my old desk) at the department, in the same room in which we used to hold our day and night consultations last summer and autumn. Nothing is wanting to dispel the impression left by the intervening passage of time and the events it has registered — to carry me back six months — but seeing you walk in with a package of letters or papers in your hand, and draw up a chair for conference.

If I had any desire to be carried back to that time, it is principally that I may fully appreciate and enjoy the great comforts and hopes and promises and blessings of the present, in promoting and hewing which you have had so great and honorable a part to act. My mind is penetrated with the deepest sense of gratitude to God for his protection and favor to our beloved country, and I venture to hope that you and I may witness the blessed return of peace and union.

10th. I had written thus far yesterday when I was called off by John Rodgers, who has not lost any of his restless activity and want of repose since leaving Port Royal. He is anxious now to get an iron steamer; and he calls my atten-

<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant Samuel W. Preston, killed in the assault on Fort Fisher, January 15, 1865. At Port Royal he was flag lieutenant to Du Pont.

tion to the difference between the praises and honors awarded to Worden and the neglect shown to Morris, although the latter's courage and patriotism were put to the severest test. He fought his guns while his ship was sinking, and cheered as she was going down. Such are the charms of novelty and success.

Commodore Smith paid a touching tribute to the memory of his son by saying, when it was reported that the *Congress* had surrendered, "Then Joe is dead."

We are expecting to hear every moment of the *Merrimac's* coming out. Fox and Mr. Grimes are both down in Hampton Roads waiting for the event. Our last successes at Island No. 10 and Corinth fill our hearts with gladness. God grant us a similar success in Hampton Roads.

Tatnall is in Norfolk. He has sent Commodore Smith his son's sword; it was received to-day.

I am nominally on duty at the Navy Department; I say nominally, because, while ordered to remain here, I have nothing special to do. There is no doubt that I was ordered home to relieve McKean, but the intentions of the department have changed. . . .

Then there is the bill creating new grades in the line, of which I sent you a copy. This bill provides for a *board of examination*, which I regard as an advisory council to the department. The determination is to make free use of this opportunity to put the navy in the highest possible state of efficiency as respects the higher grades principally. The fundamental maxim, that the navy is made for the country and not for the officers, is to be strictly applied, without acrimony and with a just regard to the rights and character of really meritorious officers who have not had an opportunity to distinguish themselves. While exchanging some views with Fox, and afterwards with Faxon, on this subject, I was led to think that I might be ordered to serve on this board. I hope not.

Mr. Sedgwick told me that as soon as the tax bill was disposed of, these two navy bills would be brought up in the House. He and several members of Congress have spoken to me very encouragingly of the passage of these bills. Experience and disappointment will lead you and I to entertain moderate hopes only. And some time must elapse before they can be carried through all the stages of legislation. I should like to know, confidentially, whether you would serve on this board. You will certainly be thought of. The character, judgment, and decisions of the board of '55 have, as Commodore Stribling remarked to me the other day, been remarkably sustained and approved by the events of the last year; and I think the navy would rejoice to see you on a board (at the head of it) designed to assist the department in making selections for the new grades. I am afraid you will feel a repugnance for this duty, which must, in some particulars, be anxious and disagreeable. I am sure I sympathize with you.

There is still another object for detaining me here in the mind of the department: it is the indefinite idea that I may be wanted. Fox has already asked me to undertake, in connection with Bache, an investigation similar to those of last summer, — *mais assez de moi-même*. . . .

Remember me most cordially to my dear Rodgers, and to all my friends, especially to McKinley, whom I forgot to mention in my last letter. Tell Rodgers his nomination has gone in. But we were thought to have been nominated and confirmed long ago, and Mr. Welles, Mr. Fox, Mr. Faxon, and Mr. Grimes would hardly believe it when I told them it was not so.

Ever, my dear Du Pont, your most faithful and affectionate friend,

CHARLES DAVIS.

There is nothing more fickle than the favor of the

great. Charleston could have been taken, but not by simply knocking at the front door, as reason had already demonstrated and as the event proved. For frankly declaring this fact, Du Pont lost favor, was treated with indignity, and relieved of his command, and passed the last two years of his life in retirement and neglect. Too harsh a judgment must not be pronounced on this act of injustice. In times of great public stress, novelty and success are the keys to favor; reason occupies a secondary place. One of the ulterior results of the battle of Port Royal, and the passage of the forts at New Orleans, was that the public had learned to believe that the ships of the navy could go anywhere and accomplish anything. Popular clamor demanded Charleston, and, failing that, a victim; and the administration was justified, to a certain extent, in yielding to popular clamor. At this particular epoch of the civil war, the rights and fortunes of an individual naval officer were of little consequence; but it was a matter of momentous importance that the administration should retain the confidence of the people. It is generally the aim of every political party to sustain itself in power, but there have been, perhaps, only two periods in our history when it has been of vital, literally vital importance, that the dominant party should retain the control of public affairs, and this was one; for, had the Democratic party been successful in the elections of 1864, there would now be two republics on the continent of North America where there is but one.

For Du Pont himself, viewed from a distance of more

than thirty years, the lustre of his fame is in no way dimmed by the dignity with which he bore unmerited mortification ; and he is remembered, not as the scape-goat of the administration in 1863, but as the distinguished and gallant officer who reorganized the navy in 1855, and led his squadron to victory in 1861.

## CHAPTER XI

### FORT PILLOW AND MEMPHIS

THERE were two enterprises which the Federal government proposed to itself at the very commencement of the war, which were followed with unflagging tenacity of purpose to a conclusion, and which together insured the final collapse of the Confederacy, regardless of the movements of armies in Virginia and along the Potomac — the blockade, and the conquest of the Mississippi. The first of these was entirely the work of the navy, and the preceding chapters have shown what Davis's share in it was. In the second the navy took a conspicuous and important part. In May, 1861, Commander John Rodgers had been detailed by the Navy Department to organize and equip a flotilla of gunboats for service on the Western rivers, to be used in coöperation with the land forces. These vessels were paid for by the quartermaster-general of the army, and in fact the Mississippi flotilla remained under the control of the War Department until the autumn of 1862. Its status was a somewhat anomalous one, as it was officered and manned entirely from the navy, and its correspondence, like that of other squadrons, was with the Navy Department, and at the same time it remained a part of the army organization. Commander Rodgers purchased

and equipped three wooden gunboats at St. Louis, but before he could take his small squadron into active service he was relieved in September by Captain A. H. Foote, to whom belongs the credit of the organization of the Mississippi flotilla.

Foote added nine vessels, built expressly for the service, to the three which Rodgers had already secured, making up the total of the flotilla to twelve. Of the later vessels, seven were armored, and a general description of them is as follows: Length, one hundred and seventy-five feet; beam, fifty-one and a half feet; draught, six feet; the hulls were of wood, built with a central casemate, with sides sloping at an angle of about thirty-five degrees, inclosing the wheel at the stern of the boat, and plated with two and a half inches of iron. This casemate formed a quadrilateral gun-deck, on which the battery of from thirteen to sixteen guns was mounted. Three of these guns, and these the heaviest, pointed directly forward. The vessels were propelled by a single stern wheel, and most of them had their machinery and boilers on deck, though in the *Benton*, the heaviest of all, which mounted sixteen guns, the machinery was below. The heaviest of the guns were ten-inch Dahlgrens; the rest were sixty-four-pounders (eight-inch), forty-two-pounders (seven-inch converted rifles), and thirty-two-pounders. The smooth-bore guns fired solid or cored roundshot, shell, grape, or canister, as the occasion required. The speed of these vessels was just about sufficient to stem the current of the Mississippi, and they were extremely awkward in manœuvre, on account of their great beam and

the single stern wheel. The wheel and machinery were a weak point, being inadequately protected, and consequently very liable to damage by the enemy's shot.

When Captain Foote was appointed to the command of the flotilla he was raised to the rank of flag officer, and hoisted his flag on board the *Benton*. The first important action in which the flotilla engaged was Fort Henry, and its success here immediately gained a prestige for the squadron which it never afterwards lost. In the struggle for the Mississippi, or at least in that part of it which took place in the north, and in the advance of the army and flotilla in Tennessee, the first strong line of Confederate defense was from Columbus on the Mississippi River to the Cumberland Mountains, including the strongholds of Fort Henry on the Tennessee River and Fort Donelson on the Cumberland. These two posts were not far distant from each other by land, and it was apparent to the Federal commanders, Generals Grant and Smith, and Commodore Foote, that by seizing and occupying these posts at the middle of the line, they would render the extremities, at Columbus and Bowling Green, untenable to the enemy and force him back to the south. Accordingly Fort Henry was attacked by the flotilla on the 6th of February, 1862, and surrendered, after a desperate resistance. Fort Donelson was attacked by the flotilla on the 14th and carried by assault by the army on the 16th. The Confederates now evacuated Columbus, which was strongly fortified,—in fact too strongly to have been carried by the flotilla alone, or indeed by the combined land and naval forces without a protracted siege,—and fell back



to the southward, upon a line whose points were Island No. 10, in the Mississippi; Fort Pillow, eighty miles above Memphis, on the Mississippi; Corinth, and Chattanooga. Island No. 10 was surrendered to the flotilla on April 7th; and in the meantime the army had advanced on Pittsburg Landing and Shiloh, where was fought the bloody battle of the 5th and 6th. But the Confederate forces rested at Corinth, which was not finally evacuated until the 29th of May. After the surrender of Island No. 10, Flag Officer Foote dropped down the river, where he lay above Fort Pillow, a position which was very strongly fortified, and which now represented the extreme left of the enemy's line. Here he remained for a month, and such was the position of the land and naval forces when Davis relieved Foote in front of Fort Pillow on the 9th of May.

While the operations which have been briefly described were in progress, the Confederates themselves had not been idle in naval matters, and had put afloat a squadron of gunboats intended to contest with the Union flotilla the supremacy of the river. Davis's old-time shipmate George N. Hollins, who held the rank of commodore in the Confederate service, and the command of the naval forces of the Confederacy on the Mississippi, was at New Orleans preparing for the threatened attack by the squadron of Flag Officer Farragut, when he was summoned to Memphis to superintend the preparation of the northern flotilla. He obeyed the order with reluctance; but by his efforts, when Davis assumed command of the Union fleet, there were eight Confederate gunboats ready for

action. These vessels were converted steamers and had the advantage of the Federal ships in speed, though not in armament, and some of them were fitted and used as rams. The Federal flotilla had been strengthened by the addition of several mortar-boats, scows with no motive power, and carrying each one mortar ; and the absence of several vessels on detached service left the total number of gunboats at eight.

Farragut's squadron had passed the forts below New Orleans on the 24th of April, seventeen days after the surrender of Island No. 10 ; and it now became the immediate naval policy of the campaign to draw the two squadrons together towards Vicksburg, while at the same time the tributary streams were to be cleared. The first step in this direction from the north was the destruction of the Confederate naval power on the river. As long as the Confederate forces held Corinth, their gunboats were safe under the guns or below the fortifications of Fort Pillow, and Memphis was their base. Here they had a navy yard and workshops, and here their squadron had been equipped ; and the Union commander remained in ignorance of its strength. There were rumors of the formidable character of some of these vessels, but the Confederates were in a position to offer or decline battle as they saw fit, and up to the 9th of May they had shown themselves only occasionally round the bend of the fortifications, and on these occasions had always avoided an encounter with the Federal fleet. From its position above Fort Pillow, the flotilla of Foote was in almost daily communication with its base at Cairo, and its mail-boats, tugs,

and supply-boats were constantly passing to and fro, bringing supplies for the squadron, while the mortar-boats, moored to the opposite bank of the river, were steadily bombarding Fort Pillow. The course of the Mississippi is here very tortuous; but it is convenient to use the words up and down, above and below, in relation to the current of the river, and not to the points of the compass.

When Davis had been ordered to Washington in March, from the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, it had been with the intention on the part of the department that he should relieve Commodore McKean in command of the East Gulf Squadron. The intentions of the department had changed, and Davis had felt no particular regret, because the operations of this squadron had no promise of importance. He was retained at the department, however, as he himself expressed it, with the indefinite idea that he might be wanted; and early in May he had been sent to New York to make another examination of the Stevens Battery.<sup>1</sup> While

<sup>1</sup> This vessel had a curious history. She was laid down in 1842, in accordance with an act of Congress authorizing the construction of an ironclad floating battery for harbor defense. She had been hardly begun when Commodore Stockton demonstrated, by experiments on targets representing the thickness of her armor, that she could be penetrated by shot. She was, therefore, rejected by the government. Her designer undertook to finish the vessel, and she was examined by a board of naval officers in 1861, and again rejected. At the death of her owner in 1865, she passed into the possession of the State of New Jersey, \$1,000,000 being bequeathed to complete her. The money was expended under the direction of General George B. McClellan, and entirely new machinery built for the ship. She was still uncompleted in 1874, and the money all expended. After several unsuccessful efforts on the part of the State to dispose of her, she was finally broken up and sold for old material.

on this duty he received a telegram from the Secretary of the Navy directing him to report to Flag Officer Foote for temporary duty with the Mississippi flotilla.

Foote had received a wound at Fort Donelson, which was slight at first, and which he made light of and neglected. It had, however, proved to be more serious than anticipated, and had become troublesome, and, under the strain of work, anxiety, and responsibility, his general health had failed. He had asked that Davis might be sent out to assist him, with no idea that he himself would be obliged to relinquish his duties; but before Davis arrived he had grown worse, and it was evident that he must give up the command, temporarily at least. There will be more to say on this subject later, but for the present it is sufficient that immediately upon the receipt of the Secretary's telegram, and without returning to Washington, Davis started for the West, reached Cairo on the 8th of May, and, taking the mail-boat down the river, he relieved Foote in command of the Mississippi flotilla on the 9th.

FLAG STEAMER BENTON,  
OFF FORT PILLOW, May 9, 1862.

. . . I came down last night, as I said I should in my note of yesterday, and breakfasted with Foote on board this vessel this morning. He was in bed when I came on board, and he was so overpowered at the sight of me that he was unable for some moments to speak. The scene was very touching; the pleasure of meeting was not without a badge of bitterness. We both shed tears. I find Foote very reduced in strength, fallen off in flesh, and depressed in spirits. His foot is painful and requires rest; his digestive organs are deranged by the

disease of the climate ; and his mind is exhausted by incessant labor, strain, and responsibility.

Still, though he looks sick, though he is thin and worn, and his face is marked with the lines of suffering and the expression of disease, yet I do not think that his health is seriously impaired. I have no doubt that he will be perfectly restored, and in a short time, by rest and the cheerful influences of his home and family. He goes to his brother's in Cleveland, Ohio, and leaves me in temporary charge during his absence. He hopes and expects to return and resume his command, and this vessel will continue to carry his flag.

He does everything to make me comfortable, leaving all his table and bed-linen, and his crockery, glass, silver, etc. He will want them if he comes back, and if he does not return I am to continue to use them.

It excites a very deep sentiment to look back to our early association as boys in the frigate *United States*, where we became intimate, and studied together for our examination. The examination of midshipmen was instituted a year or two after I entered the service, and Foote and I saw at once the necessity for commencing preparations to meet this formidable trial. We often say that we wrote the first book of seamanship (MS.) that ever was written in the service. Many the hour and day in which we sat side by side at our task. The commonplace reflection arises in my mind of how little we could then, or at any time indeed of our lives, have anticipated meeting under such circumstances as the present. . . . I shall soon write again. Everything is a blur as yet. When the mist of newness passes off I may have something to tell you. . . . Foote leaves me a mosquito net and a straw hat. We had for breakfast this morning venison, ortolans, and squirrel ; we have for dinner wild turkey, and our table is constantly supplied with game.

May 10th. We had a smart affair this morning before breakfast. The rebel gunboats came up in gallant style,

prepared for a regular engagement. The action lasted an hour, at the expiration of which the enemy, defeated and disabled, retreated in haste or dropped out of action. George Hollins commanded the rebel fleet, I am told; he was recognized, it is said.<sup>1</sup> Two of my gunboats were badly injured. I fear poor Captain Stembel is mortally wounded.

I send this hasty word to assure you of my comfortable condition. You, of course, under no persuasion, publish anything I write you of a public nature.

“And after, *this* ; and then to breakfast with  
What appetite you have.”

The breakfast was well seasoned.

May 11th. The enemy came up yesterday in very gallant style; the vessels were commanded by spirited fellows, who had evidently made up their minds to take it at the closest quarters and in the roughest way. We had scouts out yesterday, and we find that they are hard at work repairing damages, though only six of their gunboats were in sight. These gunboats of the rebels were built, I believe, by individual subscriptions; and Colonel Fitch, the military commander here, had in his hands day before yesterday two numbers of a Memphis paper in which the severest comments were made upon the inefficiency of their commanders. Colonel Fitch said, when he told me of it, that he thought they would be stimulated to some effort of a desperate nature.

It is evident that the public opinion, such as it may be, demands some effort, some display of earnestness and determination, on the part of these people, who have collected a force without, at first, any apparent purpose of using it. I have no doubt we shall have another fight soon if our gunboats do not come up the river, or if Corinth and Memphis do not fall.

<sup>1</sup> It does not appear that Hollins was in the fight. The Confederate report of the action is signed by J. E. Montgomery, senior captain commanding.

My official report goes home by this mail.<sup>1</sup>

It is curious, my getting out here, and getting Foote off just in the nick of time. The old fellow had only been out of the ship about fifteen hours when the fight took place. If the *Cincinnati* and *Mound City* were not so completely crippled Colonel Fitch and I would be already engaged in the execution of a plan for reducing Fort Pillow, of which he is the author, and which I found on the tapis when I came out. As it is, we must wait for several days. . . .

I will tell you, in confidence, that the *Cincinnati* and *Mound City* were so much injured by the enemy's rams that it was necessary to let them run up on the bank and settle. The latter is free again, but not repaired. The *Cincinnati* has the water in her yet.

It is not evident that the Confederate commander knew that Foote had just been relieved, though it is probable that he may have received this information; and it looks as if he had taken this opportunity to attack while the new commander was still fresh and unaccustomed to his surroundings. Although it was Davis's habit of mind to prepare for action by a regular process of reflection, in this case, if in no other of his life, he was forced to act on the spur of the moment. At the commencement of the battle of Fort Pillow, the advantage was decidedly with the enemy. He had chosen his own time to attack, while the commander of the Union fleet was entirely new to the work, and without experience in river warfare; and his ships had the great advantages of superiority of speed and of the support of Fort Pillow. If it had not been

<sup>1</sup> For Davis's official reports while in command of the Mississippi flotilla, see the *Report of the Secretary of the Navy for 1862*, Appendix.

for these advantages, the disabled Confederate vessels would have been either captured or destroyed in this action, as they were a month later at Memphis; but Davis's sphere was limited by the guns of the very powerful batteries of Fort Pillow, and his ships were too slow to chase. All he could do was to beat the enemy back to shelter.

On the morning of May 10th, Davis's flotilla was lying in two divisions, with steam up, the first division of four ironclad gunboats moored to the Tennessee shore, and the second division, of unarmored vessels, moored to the Arkansas shore. The enemy appeared at the bend of the river at a few minutes past seven o'clock, prepared for battle. In obedience to a signal from the *Benton*, the Union vessels immediately cast off their lines. All were lying with their bows downstream. The leading vessels of the enemy's squadron made directly for mortar-boat No. 16, which was, for the moment, unprotected. The master of this vessel, Acting Master Gregory, behaved with great spirit, and used his mortar with a depressed elevation and reduced charge. Captain Stembel, in the *Cincinnati*, which was the leading vessel on that side of the river, and Captain Kilty, in the *Mound City*, coming to the support of the mortar-boat, were rammed repeatedly; but at the closest quarters, and with the muzzles of her guns almost touching the enemy's sides, the *Cincinnati* poured a broadside into the ship which had rammed her, which drifted downstream totally disabled. In this encounter, however, Captain Stembel<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Captain Stembel recovered from his wound, and still lives, a retired rear admiral.



was severely wounded by sharp-shooters on the enemy's decks. By this time the action had become general; the *Cincinnati* was rammed again, but a shot from the bow-gun of the *Benton* exploded the boiler of the vessel which had rammed her. The loss of life on board this ship was frightful. Both the leading vessels of the enemy's line were disabled by the fire of the *Benton*, and, like the vessel which had first rammed the *Cincinnati*, drifted downstream disabled. The third of the enemy's vessels of the western line was also blown up in her boilers and drifted out of action. The fight lasted the better part of an hour, the remaining ships of the enemy retreating in haste below the guns of Fort Pillow. The *Cincinnati* and *Mound City* were run on the bank and settled, but were immediately afterwards freed and repaired.<sup>1</sup> The casualties on the Union side were slight, but the loss on the part of the Confederates must have been enormous. Captain Phelps, of the *Benton*, estimates that every man on board the ship which was blown up by the first shot from the *Benton's* rifled bow-gun was either killed or disabled; and the Union commander learned from deserters a few days after the battle that one hundred and eight were buried on shore at one time.

This action, like the one succeeding it at Memphis, was the roughest kind of hand-to-hand fighting; for the narrowness of the river between the banks left little room for manœuvring, and after the fleets were once engaged, where both sides were willing, it was neces-

<sup>1</sup> See the official report. The best detailed account of this action is in the letter of Captain S. L. Phelps, commanding the *Benton*, to Comodore Foote. *Vide Hoppin's Life of Foote*, p. 317.

sarily a promiscuous fight. The want of protection over the boilers and machinery, in these river vessels, exposed them to damages in which casualties became a general calamity.

This was the first purely naval engagement of the war in which squadron was pitted against squadron, and it was contested with great spirit on both sides.

Davis's first care after the battle of Fort Pillow was to free the *Cincinnati* and *Mound City* of water and repair them. It was necessary to send the *Cincinnati* to the depot at Cairo, but her place was taken by the *Louisville*, a sister ship, which joined the flag two days after the fight. On the 16th Davis wrote: —

I am happy to say that the gunboat *Cincinnati* left yesterday for Cairo. She has been a great trouble to me. Her injuries proved to be so much greater than at first supposed, that I had at one time very serious apprehensions that she would not be raised in time to get her off the bank, the river is falling so fast.

The only trouble was not the loss of the boat. Her helpless condition confined me to a spot somewhat nearer to the enemy's batteries than I care to lie at all times, especially if deprived of the power of motion. I am now free to move again.

I see here the Chicago and other Western papers chiefly. There is great rejoicing in this section of the country over our victory of the 10th inst. The dread of the rebel rams and gunboats along the rivers was similar to that once entertained on the seacoast concerning the *Merrimac*. It was feared, and foretold by the alarmists, that they would pass this squadron, and lay the Northern cities under contribution. Their speed would enable them to do so, but they would not dare to attempt the passage of Island No. 10.

The feeling in the East will be indifferent, I suppose, particularly now the public mind is absorbed by the brilliant achievement of the army.

General Quinby came to see me early this morning, to concoct plans for the capture of Fort Pillow.

The following note from Foote was received on the 18th:—

CLEVELAND, May 15, 1862.

MY DEAR DAVIS, — I congratulate you, and hope that a vote of thanks and passage of the naval bill will make you an admiral for your ready coming to my relief when too ill to do my duty, and making such a glorious fight.

I was interested to find those fellows so plucky, and must confess to some little envy in not being able to have taken a hand in your dashing affair.

I reached here with less fatigue than I anticipated, but was bored by the good people everywhere to speak and show myself. I feel it to be unmerited on my part, this wonderful attention, and it is particularly unpleasant associated with my leaving to you liability for another fight at any moment.

I am in a great hurry to return and relieve you; my heart is with the flotilla, but I was in a condition wholly unfit to command when I left, and did right in leaving, as the interests of the flotilla required it. . . . I feel rather better, and hope in two weeks to leave for Cairo to join you as soon as possible.

Excuse my incoherent note.

Yours ever affectionately,

A. H. FOOTE.

Fort Pillow was situated at a point where the river makes a decided bend under the bluffs, and the water batteries extended along the shore, in the curve, for a

mile and a half. They mounted about forty heavy guns, one of which was a ten-inch, the rest being rifled sixty-four and thirty-two pounders. On the bluffs above the water batteries the Confederates had constructed a line of intrenchments, so as to occupy the ridges of a series of hills, and in these about thirty field-pieces were posted at the most advantageous positions in the salients. The camps of a large garrison were situated in the rear of the batteries, and capacious magazines had been dug in the sides of the hills, which were reported to contain a large supply of ammunition. The post was commanded by General Villepique, a native of New Orleans, who was said to be, next to Beauregard, the best engineer in the Confederate service. The Confederates placed great reliance on his military skill, and on the strength of these works, which were, in fact, sufficiently powerful to hold the Union flotilla in check.

General Quinby, who commanded on the right of the Federal line, was in daily expectation of reinforcements, and the plan of attack was an assault on the part of the army, supported by a bombardment from the mortar-boats and a direct attack by the fleet; but the extent of the works made this plan very uncertain, unless a large number of troops could be employed. The enemy's gunboats remained quiescent below the fort; in fact, they had been very seriously damaged in the fight of the 10th. As Captain Phelps wrote to Commodore Foote,<sup>1</sup> "The loss of the rebels must have been very heavy. Their vessels were literally torn to

<sup>1</sup> Hoppin's *Life of Foote*, p. 318.

pieces, and some had holes in their sides through which a man could walk. Those that blew up,—it makes me shudder to think of them.” Davis knew, however, that they were repairing damages as rapidly as possible, and he expected another attack from them. His mortar-boats kept up an incessant fire on the fort, to which the enemy’s guns occasionally responded; and about this time his squadron was reinforced by the addition of several rams, under the command of Colonel Ellet. It was one of the peculiarities of his position that Ellet could attach himself to the squadron without coming under his command. He appears to have been a free lance; a civilian adventurer, who was not even under military authority, and who acted exactly according to his own fancy, receiving orders from no one. His vessels were ordinary river-steamers mounting no guns, and acting as rams only. They were strengthened by longitudinal beams of wood; the boilers and machinery were protected by logs and cotton-bales; and they were superior in speed to the gunboats. Of course Ellet could only move when the squadron moved, as his vessels were powerless unless supported by the gunboats; but he was in a position to take a free hand in anything that was going on, and, as will be seen later, he handled his vessels with great boldness in the battle at Memphis, although only two of them were engaged, and he himself was mortally wounded, and was mentioned in dispatches by Davis. His wound was not considered serious at first, and he probably would have recovered had he regarded the surgeon’s advice; but he really died from incessant writing to the newspapers.

Notoriety seems to have been a mania with him. He left the rams to the command of his brother, Lieutenant-Colonel Ellet. Ellet and his rams will be mentioned in the narrative whenever their services occur ; but as the elder Ellet had succeeded in gaining what was probably the height of his ambition, — an extended notoriety, — and as his actions were coincident with and dependent upon the movements of Davis's flotilla, his whole history, as far as it relates to the operations on the Mississippi, must be considered in its just and proper value.

The following passages are selected from Davis's letters while lying off Fort Pillow : —

May 21st. General Quinby came down last evening with reinforcements, and last night we had a council of war. According to the best information, they [the rebels] have very few people now at Fort Pillow. The story is that they have gone down to Randolph [a fortified post on the river, between Fort Pillow and Memphis]. Their gunboats are not in their usual anchorage. Our plot is a good plot. We require a little luck to carry it through successfully.

There are at Cairo and St. Louis, on the stocks and unfinished, vessels that would make us perfect masters of the river and everything in it. But they will not be finished till the war is over. Is not this truly provoking ?

May 24th. You must know for your further comfort that my squadron has been increased by the return of the gunboat *Mound City*, and the addition of four vessels that may be described in the language of the law as *abutters*, or, in Scriptural phrase, as Buzites of the kindred of *Ram*. Others of the same sort are expected. They are not good for much in reality, but they are so formidable in appearance that they would strike terror to the soul of Kilhard.

I cannot tell what damage I did to the rebel fleet. Two of their vessels dropped out of action, enveloped in steam and smoke, in the first fifteen minutes, and one appeared to sink as she rounded the point. The information given by the refugees (who are numerous) is, that she was kept afloat twenty-four hours and then sank, and that we killed one hundred and eight of the rebels. This is the least estimate ; others give more.

I am doing nothing just now. General Quinby, after reconnoitring the ground, came to the conclusion that he had not men enough to undertake the combined movement we had agreed upon, and he has gone back to wait for more. I will keep you posted up as to my movements.

May 28th. A party of deserters from the fort came in day before yesterday, and another yesterday. They agree in the number of troops, etc., and also in portraying the condition of the rebel soldiers as one of suffering from want of good and sufficient food, and of general disgust and discontent. They say that there would be a great many desertions if less watchfulness were observed. The men do not share with the officers in their violent animosities. . . . Nothing could be more tame and uninteresting than the present state of things. Our mortars go off about once in five minutes ; those of the rebels, only occasionally. General Quinby I have not heard from since he went back to Hickman. But I have no idea he will be able to get reinforcements till after the fate of Corinth is decided ; and without them, no attack can be judiciously attempted upon Fort Pillow. The service, which consists in standing and waiting, is suited to us, but not at all to the other side, to whom delay is the moth and rust that doth corrupt.

May 29th. I have now an addition of five or six rams to the squadron, and the gunboats have received the protection of cypress logs and of iron rails in their weakest parts. If I could get at them [the enemy's fleet] I should make the

attack myself, and my own anxiety is now, not to avoid, but to renew the fight clear of the guns of Fort Pillow. I say to you, what is literally true, that what is written by the newspaper correspondents is the merest twaddle, — a mixture of fact and speculation, of observation and invention, from which even I, on the spot, should find it difficult to separate the true from the guess. You may be amused with it, but not seriously affected. The reporters live on board a steamer a mile or two up the river, and glean the substance of their communications from hearsay.

✓ I am sending a steamer up the river to-day to pick up the poor refugees, who stand on the banks begging our mail-boats to take them on board with their families.

May 30th. I must fulfill my promise to tell you something about this vessel. The captain of the ship, Lieutenant-Commanding S. L. Phelps,<sup>1</sup> is my messmate; he is an uncommonly clever officer, a person of superior education, and a very amiable companion. He manages the affairs of the mess, and, you will be glad to hear, likes fresh strawberries, lettuce, and radishes; sends for Mackinaw trout; orders fresh gooseberry tarts (resembling in this respect the Queen of Hearts); keeps always a plentiful supply of ice, sometimes with mutton on it; and, finally, is very fond of tea, which he makes with scrupulous care himself.

My quarters are well enough in themselves, though small, and, compared with the *Wabash*, mean; but they are not well situated. They are amidships of the vessel: on one side of them are the pantry and cooking-stove; on the other,

<sup>1</sup> Captain Phelps served throughout the war on the Mississippi, and was in action and under fire oftener, perhaps, than any officer of the navy. Like others who served on the river, his services were not appreciated by the department. He resigned at the close of the war, was at one time a Commissioner of the District of Columbia, and he rendered distinguished service as United States Minister to Peru during the war between that country and Chili.



the marines ; so that I am exposed to all the noises, sights, and smells of the vessel, and am subject to being always overlooked if I let down the blinds and open the doors, and to being suffocated if I don't. Added to these inconveniences, the cabin is dark. But it is well enough for the present.

The proper flagship of the squadron is a vessel called the *Eastport*, now in the hands of the mechanics at Mound City, four or six miles [six] above Cairo. She is large, well built, and protected, with good power and speed, and I hope her accommodations will be satisfactory and well-placed. This vessel has no speed, will hardly overcome the current of the river, and is a mere tub and beast. Happily she is not very valuable.

May 31st. Fort Pillow has neither been evacuated nor reinforced. We know its status pretty well from day to day (the deserters are frequent), and to-day is the first time we have had any intimation of a movement looking towards evacuation, and to-day we receive intelligence which we think reliable of the evacuation of Corinth. Our scouts are always on the alert.

Of one thing be assured, that, if I ever get near that rebel fleet again, I shall destroy it, unless they anticipate me themselves. I am highly gratified, greatly, greatly pleased, with what you say of the good opinion of my neighbors ; and I am very much pleased with your account of your interview with James Lawrence. Nothing could be more pleasant than such things ; but you know I do not suffer myself to be elated with these kind and over-kind opinions,—in themselves so evanescent and liable to change. A reverse to-morrow would alter all this mouth-honor—breath! *Equam mentem servare*, not only in adversity but in prosperity. I am sure that I have a trial of my philosophy now, for my situation is a disagreeable one.<sup>1</sup>

June 2d. The confirmation of the evacuation of Corinth

<sup>1</sup> Refers to his anomalous status in command.

encourages the hope that we may be able to move soon. The great fall of the river, since my arrival, has laid open a new road for the land attack; and I hope now that General Quinby will be here soon with a sufficient number of men to authorize the attack on Fort Pillow.

You shall have my plans from time to time as they are developed. The poor refugees disturb my happiness very much. They are as desolate and unhappy as exile and poverty can make them. I have sent a steamer up the river for their special relief. There are women and children among them, and to see the latter unhappy takes away the beauty of life.

A man was killed in the mortar-fleet this morning in a curious way. He had a cylinder of loose powder over his shoulder and a lighted cigar in his mouth. His head was blown off. These mortar-men are said to be very careless.

June 3d. We are less in want of the excitement of the mail to-day than usual. There has been a little skirmish between two scouting parties, in which a rebel officer was killed; and further, there have been some movements during the night, and during the two previous days, indicating an intention on the part of the rebels to evacuate. It was a maxim of Napoleon that a bridge of gold should be made for a flying enemy, but if General Quinby were here we would try to anticipate their movements.

June 5th. Colonel Fitch discovered several days ago a weak and assailable point by which he proposed to attack the enemy's works by land, while I encountered the batteries in front. It was agreed between us that this should come off yesterday morning; but a foolish movement of Colonel Ellet prevented it in a way that could not have been foreseen.

The movement was then to have been made this morning, as soon after daylight as possible. But the rebels retreated yesterday and last night, after, as usual, destroying everything. They evidently think that suicide is victory. These

works are very extensive and very strong. It must have cost the poor devils some pangs of mortification to abandon them without a struggle.

I am now lying under the batteries of Fort Pillow, waiting for Colonel Fitch to return from some examinations he is making. As soon as he comes back we will make our preparations for going down the river. I do not believe that there is any force at Randolph. If not, there is probably no interruption between here and Memphis, except, perhaps, the enemy's gunboats, and they would detain us but a short time. I am too busy to write a long note.

Davis got under way with the flotilla, from his anchorage under the abandoned batteries of Fort Pillow, at noon on the 5th of June, leaving one gunboat, the *Pittsburg*, to coöperate with a detachment of Colonel Fitch's command in holding possession of Fort Pillow and securing public property there, and another, the *Mound City*, to convoy the transports conveying the troops when they should be ready to move. On the way down, the squadron came suddenly, at a bend of the river, upon the Confederate transport steamer *Sovereign*, which was captured and proved a valuable prize. The gunboats anchored, at eight o'clock in the evening, at the lower end of Island No. 45, about a mile and a half above the city of Memphis. The mortar-boats, tugs, ordnance, commissary, and other vessels of the fleet moored to the bank of Island No. 44 for the night.

At daylight on the morning of the 6th the enemy's fleet of rams and gunboats, now numbering eight vessels, was discovered lying at the levee at the city. They cast off their lines, and dropped below Railroad

Point, and then, returning, ranged themselves in front of the city. At twenty minutes past four the Union flotilla, consisting of the five gunboats, — flagship *Benton*, Captain S. L. Phelps; *Louisville*, Captain B. M. Dove; *Carondelet*, Captain Henry Walke; *Cairo*, Captain N. C. Bryant; and *St. Louis*, Captain Wilson McGunnegle, — got under way by signal and dropped down the river. The Confederate squadron, placing itself between Davis and the city, opened fire, with the intention of exposing the city to injury from the Federal shot; but the fire was returned with due care in this regard. While the squadrons were approaching each other in this manner, two vessels of the ram fleet, the *Monarch* and *Queen of the West*, ran rapidly to the front and steamed into the enemy's line. Several conflicts had taken place between the rams on both sides before the slower-moving squadron of gunboats, led by the *Benton*, could come into close action; in the meantime, however, the firing was continuous and well directed.

The *General Beauregard* and *Little Rebel* (Confederate) were struck by shell in the boilers and blown up. The ram *Queen of the West*, commanded by Colonel Ellet in person, struck the Confederate *General Lovell* and sunk her, but sustained serious damage herself. Up to this time the Confederate vessels had maintained their position and used their guns with great spirit, but these disasters induced the remaining vessels to seek safety by a precipitate retreat, relying upon their superiority of speed; a running fight ensued, carrying both squadrons ten miles downstream,

and lasting more 'than an hour. It resulted in the capture or destruction of four out of the five of the remaining vessels of the enemy ; only one, the *Van Dorn*, escaping. The fate of the eight vessels of the Confederates was as follows : The *General Lovell*, sunk in the beginning of the action, went down in deep water, carrying many of her crew with her. Some escaped by swimming, and, in the heat of the action, the *Benton* lowered her boats to rescue those in the water. The *General Beauregard*, blown up in her boilers and injured otherwise by shot, sank near the shore. The *Little Rebel*, injured by shot, made for the Arkansas shore, and was abandoned by her crew. The *Jeff Thompson*, set on fire by shells, was run on shore and abandoned. She burnt to the water's edge, and blew up in her magazine. The *General Price*, rammed and injured by shot, was also run on the Arkansas shore and abandoned. The *Sumter*, somewhat cut up, and the *General Bragg*, shattered in her upper works and hull, were captured. The *Van Dorn* escaped.<sup>1</sup>

Davis estimated that the *Sumter*, *General Bragg*, and *Little Rebel* might be repaired. Not even an approximate statement could be made of the loss on the part of the enemy, which must have been very serious. The *General Lovell*, going down in deep water, carried part of her crew with her ; and the *General Beauregard*, blown up with steam, had many of her crew frightfully scalded. The casualties on the Federal side were insignificant. The mortar-boats took no part in the action, but their commander, Captain

<sup>1</sup> See the official report of the action.

Maynadier, accompanied the squadron in a tug, took possession of the *General Beauregard*, and made her crew prisoners.

The result of this action was the annihilation of the Confederate naval power on the Mississippi. It never appeared again as an organized force, and Davis's flotilla was now free to navigate the river from Cairo to Vicksburg. After the battle the squadron returned to Memphis, and the following correspondence took place. Davis's first letter is to the point, and is very characteristic. The mayor's somewhat testy response is softened in the tone of the next letter by a recognition of the inevitable, and perhaps by a sense of relief in turning over to other hands the government of a turbulent city : —

UNITED STATES FLAG STEAMER BENTON,  
OFF MEMPHIS, June 6, 1862.

SIR, — I have the honor to request that you will surrender the city of Memphis to the authority of the United States, which I have the honor to represent.

I am, Mr. Mayor, with high respect,

Your most obedient servant,

C. H. DAVIS,

Flag Officer commanding, etc.

His Honor the Mayor of the City of Memphis, Tenn.

MAYOR'S OFFICE, MEMPHIS, June 6, 1862.

SIR, — Your note of this day is received, and contents noted. In reply I have only to say that the civil authorities have no resources of defense, and by the force of circumstances the city is in your power.

Respectfully,

JOHN PARK, Mayor.

C. H. DAVIS, Flag Officer commanding, etc.

UNITED STATES FLAG STEAMER BENTON,  
OFF MEMPHIS, June 6, 1862.

SIR, — The undersigned, commanding the military and naval forces of the United States in front of Memphis, have the honor to say to the mayor of the city that Colonel Fitch, commanding the Indiana brigade, will take military possession of Memphis immediately.

Colonel Fitch will be happy to receive the coöperation of his Honor the Mayor and the city authorities in maintaining peace and order; and to this end he will be pleased to confer with his Honor at military headquarters at three o'clock this afternoon.

The undersigned have the honor to be, with high respect, your most obedient servants,

C. H. DAVIS,  
Flag Officer, commanding afloat.  
G. N. FITCH,  
Colonel, commanding Indiana brigade.

His Honor the Mayor of the City of Memphis, Tenn.

MAYOR'S OFFICE, MEMPHIS, June 6, 1862.

GENTLEMEN, — Your communication is received, and I shall be happy to coöperate with the colonel commanding in providing measures for maintaining peace and order in the city.

Your most obedient servant,

JOHN PARK, Mayor.

Flag Officer C. H. DAVIS and Colonel G. N. FITCH.

The battle had been witnessed by the entire population of Memphis assembled on the levee, and expecting an easy victory for their own fleet. The Confederate accounts of the battle state that the *General Lovell* was sunk by shot, and not by the ram *Queen of the West*. The transports arrived at eleven o'clock, and Colonel Fitch immediately took military possession of

the city. Davis remained in front of Memphis with the flotilla during the month of June, and the narrative may be continued by quoting again from his letters : —

FLAGSHIP BENTON, MEMPHIS, June 6, 1862.

My early rising yesterday morning, the fatigues of yesterday, the limited allowance of rest last night, and this morning's fight, have left me so weary that I can only congratulate you on my success of this morning, which has nearly annihilated the rebel fleet, and removed it forever as a subject of anxiety. You will have the most excellent and ample description of the fight by Mr. Coffin, of the "Boston Journal," who was happily in the fleet and a witness of the whole affair.

Thank God for this great success. If the gunboats had fled before me, as their speed easily enabled them to do, they would still have been a thorn in our side. Now they can give us no further trouble ; and, moreover, the blockading force of the river by the rebels is destroyed. You will not depend on me for the story, but keep all good accounts for me to see.

June 7th. Fear and doubt still prevail here, and the freedom of society has by no means yet taken the place of the arbitrary military control which our occupation suppressed.

June 8th. Yours of the 28th reached me on the 6th, the day of the engagement. . . . You express a great deal of anxiety about me, and very naturally. My situation was, I may now say, a very unpleasant one. I felt it fully. To attack the batteries and rebel fleet with my own insignificant force would have been an extreme folly, a risk which nothing could have justified. For my first and special duty was to retain command of the river. This was the charge I had to keep, my particular trust. Losing that command, I exposed the long extent of country bordering on the Mississippi to St. Louis, bordering on the Ohio, the Tennessee,



the Cumberland, and all their tributaries. I exposed the rear of General Halleck's army at Corinth; and, finally, I renewed the alarms of war throughout the West and Northwest, losing all the hard-won advantages of Foote and Pope. I was, in fact, just in a situation to carry out the maxim that "Grab is a good dog, but Holdfast is a better."

Besides, even if I could have silenced the guns on the long line of fortifications at Fort Pillow, I had no means of taking possession of the works and holding them. General Quinby thought his force, amounting to twenty-two hundred men, insufficient for the purpose; and I could contribute nothing, for it would have been ridiculous to unman the ships to man the forts.

Though all this was manifest, the public was getting restless and dissatisfied with our apparent inactivity; and I experienced what it is to be goaded by public opinion against my judgment. Patience, that sovereign virtue, —

"When *he* has done most, yet will I

Add an honor, a great patience,"

by preëminence the great virtue of the military leader, — was the quality I was called upon to display. It would have been a great advantage under such circumstances to have the support of a reputation previously acquired. But it is all over now, though it was a very uncomfortable time while it lasted.

You must not forget that I like to hear what people say about the flotilla and myself and the fight that is *agreeable*, — nothing disagreeable. I do know of no greater folly that men commit habitually than that of making themselves miserable by reading other people's abuse or fault-finding of them. They ought to follow Charlotte Brontë's wise rule; my vanity is lively enough, but too wise, sensitive, self-indulgent, and sympathetic for that, — "Bring me no more reports," except pleasant ones. Praise is delicious coming from the right source. *Laudatus a viro laudato*, — that is good.

June 10th. Last Friday morning, when the action commenced, there were three little tugs lying in the fleet, which hastened to get out of the way of the shot, any one of which would have sunk them. For safety these little things clung together, their sides touching each other, and paddled off as rapidly as possible. Compared with the gunboats they are like pigmies, and, as they retired from the scene of danger, they looked like little children going off hand in hand. The sight was really touching, and this very simile occurred to me at the time.

You ask what you shall send me. There is nothing I am so much in want of as a glass of wine. I am overrun with visitors, and sometimes a person comes to whom I wish to be hospitable. It is the custom among some civilized nations on such occasions to offer a glass of wine to a friend or visitor. I have no wine, nothing but water, and Mississippi water at that, — more dirty than that which runs down the gutter of Beacon Street in a summer shower. Send me a dozen of pale sherry.

June 12th. The "Appeal" says the rebel rams "can hold the Mississippi against Foote and Farragut."

The above from the "Memphis Appeal" is one of a thousand similar examples of self-deception. It is an interesting fact that may escape notice that the rebel fleet originated here, and exhausted all its glories and boasts, its pride and its vauntings, its triumphs and ostentatious displays, here; and here, too, it ate its leek, and "out of doubt, and out of questions, too, and ambiguities." Its defeat was witnessed by its friends, its owners [it was a joint-stock company], and its enemies, too. "Earl Percy sees my fall!"

June 13th. Yesterday our hospital boat, just fitted out at St. Louis, came down the river and anchored by our side. I wish you could see her. You would be most agreeably struck with her neatness, airiness, and comfortable accommodations. She is an honor to her projectors and to the govern-

ment. She has nurses, a laundress, and other things "according." Strange to say, her captain is an old shipmate and messmate of mine in the frigate *United States*. Thirty-nine years ago nearly, we went on board ship together; and thirty-five years since we parted in New York, to meet only once again, and that was soon after, in 1828, till we came together yesterday. I recalled his features and he mine. He has not a gray hair in his head or his beard. He contrasted, with high satisfaction, his brown rough hair and whiskers with my bald head and white beard, little thinking that it was in a measure on account of them that he was then begging me to improve his own situation and get a place for his son.

June 19th. We have a melancholy day to-day. A gunboat returned this morning from the expedition up White River, bringing an account of an engagement with two forts there by our vessels and the troops under Colonel Fitch, in which the former were captured. It was a gallant little affair. The gunboats silenced the first fort, and the troops carried the second by storm. But the victory was dearly purchased. An accidental shot from the enemy's second battery penetrated the steam-drum of the gunboat *Mound City*, and scalded the greater part of the crew, after having killed four men outright. The complement of the *Mound City* is one hundred and seventy-five men and officers. Of these, eighty-two are already buried; forty-three were drowned or killed by the savage enemy while in the water; twenty-five are badly wounded (scalded), in which number is included Captain Kilty. The wounded promise to do well, and twenty-five only of the one hundred and seventy-five — three officers and twenty-two men — escaped without injury. This scene of horror was rendered more frightful by the enemy's shooting our wounded and scalded men in the water, and by firing into the boats of the other vessels of the squadron which came to the assistance of the poor, helpless, drowning, and

scalded victims. Contrast this with our humanity on the 6th, when our boats and tugs were busily employed in rescuing the disabled enemy in and out of the water.

This barbarous conduct on the part of the enemy will lead to terrible retaliation. The men of the squadron are now very much excited, and vow vengeance.

Some touching incidents occurred after the action. After the first agonies and distress of the calamity were over, most of the patients died quietly and without pain. They, many of them, disposed of purses and small effects; some sent home their swords, watches, etc.; several said they were satisfied to die, when they were told that the forts were ours. Lastly, some few officers ordered their bodies to be sent home. You will naturally be anxious lest a similar accident should happen to the *Benton*. She, however, is better protected than the other boats, and her machinery is underneath the deck and mostly under water. It is told me that the *Mound City* had one hundred and sixty pounds pressure on at the time of the explosion. The explosion of the *General Beauregard* in the action of the 6th — I passed within a hundred feet of her when the steam was pouring out — gave me an idea of the horror of such an accident. So also did the explosion of the *Van Dorn* in the action at Fort Pillow, though I was very much farther from her at the time.

June 20th. I find to my comfort that I have forty-one of the poor fellows, who were scalded with steam on board the *Mound City*, in the hospital boat, instead of twenty-five as I wrote you yesterday. I have been to see them this morning, and find that most of them will recover. General Wallace, who dined with me yesterday, and is a very agreeable person, sent two surgeons from his division, — Dr. Jessup and Dr. McClellan, — and the number of nurses has been increased. Sister Angela, Superior of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, offered the services of the Sisters when needed, while the hospital boat was fitting out at St. Louis, and I have

written to Captain Pennock to send for them. I went on board last night, and saw some of the bad cases dressed. It was a very painful sight, particularly so because the faces are so terribly disfigured, — red, swollen, blistered, and distorted. . . . But comfort yourself with the idea that they are well cared for.

June 22d. General Lew Wallace came on board yesterday afternoon by appointment, and we took a run down the river in one of the tugs to look at the buried, or mostly buried, remains of the *Jeff Thompson* and *Beauregard*. The former is the vessel that was blown up in her magazine. I landed on the river bank, which is strewn near the water with iron braces and fastenings and with charred remains of broken timbers. Some trees on the water's edge are scorched by the conflagration. The smoke-stack of this vessel is still standing and visible, to mark the spot where she descended. The *Beauregard* is irrevocably gone, but a good deal of her still shows above the water. From her we went to the hospital ship, where, at first, the general was very unwilling to go. I had given up the thought of taking him there when he asked me to do so. General Lew (as he is called) Wallace has seen a great deal of service. He was distinguished on the bloody field of Shiloh, and still more at Fort Donelson, where he won his present rank. He had seen the field of battle after the rapture of the strife had subsided, and the earthquake voice of victory had died away. He describes it as a most painful, dreadful sight. But this scene of suffering was more oppressive, he said, than a battlefield. In truth it has quite unmanned me. The patients are doing well this morning with one exception. Kilty<sup>1</sup> gets along very well, and the doctor, who we thought was sinking yesterday, revived last evening, and is better this morning.

<sup>1</sup> Captain Kilty lost his arm, and was promoted. He died a retired rear admiral in 1879. He was Davis's senior in age, and before the war had been his senior in rank.

June 23d. Our expedition to White River is in some measure a failure, owing to the low stage of the river. The boats have returned to the mouth of the river, having grounded several times and run the risk of being detained all summer.

June 24th. The extreme heat, and consequent suffering and danger to the scalded patients, induced me to send the hospital boat to Cairo, with the expectation that some would go home, some would be put into the Mound City Hospital, and some go to St. Louis. The weather has been very unfavorable to the poor fellows: some have already sunk under it; many more, I fear, will be overcome. It is very touching to witness the cool and determined manner in which some of these brave men are struggling with death. They are determined to make use of every means of recovery, and keep themselves very quiet. One poor fellow, one of the worst scalded, said to me yesterday: "I hope you will keep your health, sir." I am glad she has gone (the hospital boat), not only because the patients will be better off and in a cooler climate, but as a relief to myself. I was losing my appetite and spirits by the distressing sights, and still more by the offensive smell of the hospital. I must have something to sweeten my imagination.

June 25th. We are having now one of the hot terms, and it is worse, I think, than Central America. There the sea breeze and the land breeze alternated, and there was almost always some air stirring, except in the early morning. I must confess, however, that I have always endured the hot weather very well; and, when I think what a pleasant station this would be in winter, I hope I shall be able to fight through the summer and retain my flag, which, by the way, I am so lucky in getting. How many above me are without one!

I had a note from Foote this morning, telling me he has a leave of absence for three months, and grieving over the loss of his command. I am truly sorry for him. He labored

wonderfully hard to build up this flotilla, and he regards it as his own affair, and justly, too. I am very much grieved for him, and I shall write him word he can have the command again as soon as he wishes for it.

June 28th. Since finishing the inclosed letter I have received a message from Farragut, asking me to come down and help him take Vicksburg. I am getting ready to go now, and as I move, like an old Highland chief, with my tail on, my preparations are few and many, like the old woman's troubles. I am afraid our regular communications will be interrupted for some time, and think it not impossible you may not hear from me for several days. But I shall come right back as soon as the circumstances will permit.

This I mean to make my headquarters, if left to myself. There is a wide field of work and usefulness in the tributaries, and I mean to make this my depot of stores, workshops, etc.

A word remains to be said, before this chapter closes, in relation to Davis's status during the first month of his command on the river; and it is a difficult word to write. In justice to Davis himself, however, it must be said.

Davis had come into the flotilla, for temporary duty, at the request of Foote himself, and he had expected to be second in command with Foote, as he had been second in command with Du Pont. On April 29th Foote wrote to the Secretary of the Navy, "Your unofficial note of the 23d, referring to Captain Davis being ordered to report to me, *but on no account to relieve me in command*, has been received;" but on May 9th, when Davis arrived on board the *Benton*, Foote was sick in bed, and totally incapacitated for duty. He left the same day for Cleveland, Ohio, and his first and

only order to Davis was, "You will be pleased, during my absence, to perform *all the duties of the flag officer ; and as such, and being hereby invested with flag officer's authority*, all officers and others attached to and connected with this flotilla will obey your orders and act under your instructions."

That is, Davis did relieve Foote fully and completely, and Foote never, from the day he left the *Benton* at Fort Pillow, had any control over, or official relation to or with, the flotilla in any way whatever, either remote or direct ; but his flag still flew on board the *Benton*, and the arrangement was such as to put Davis in a thoroughly equivocal position, in which any credit which might accrue to the flotilla might pass to the officer still constructively in command, though actually and permanently separated from the field of action by hundreds of miles, and too ill in body to perform any duty at all ; and the responsibility for disaster and failure, should such occur, would necessarily rest and remain with the officer "*invested with flag officer's authority ;*" and, in this ambiguous relation toward the constructive commander-in-chief, Davis fought two principal battles which annihilated the enemy's naval power on the Mississippi, and Foote's biographer was able and willing complacently to declare, with barely a reference to Davis himself, that "*Fort Pillow was actually captured while he [Foote] was still in command.*"

The presence of Foote's flag on board the *Benton* on the Mississippi River, from May 9th to June 23d, while he himself was sick in bed in Cleveland, Ohio,



makes the question a peculiar one from a naval point of view. The flag of an admiral or flag officer has but one signification: it means the actual presence on board from day to day of the officer whose rank it designates; and it flies only from the ship in which that officer is actually embarked. If he is separated from the ship, the flag is hauled down. There is but one exception to this rule in naval law and usage, and that is in case the admiral himself is killed in battle, when his flag continues to fly until the engagement is over, and is then hauled down to half-mast as long as his body remains on board. It is a scandalous thing for a flag officer to keep his flag flying on board of one ship, in battle, while he himself is actually on board of another. This was one of the gravest of the charges under which the Italian admiral, Persano, was tried for his life, after the battle of Lissa; and the instance of Perry's shifting his flag from one ship to another during the battle on Lake Erie is familiar to every schoolboy, and marks and emphasizes the inviolable rule that the flag proclaims the bodily presence of the commander-in-chief.

It must be said that Foote fully expected, when he left the *Benton*, that his absence would be only temporary, and that it was judged inexpedient to haul down the flag in the presence of the enemy. It must also be said that Davis himself acquiesced in the arrangement; but neither of these facts makes the act itself less one of impropriety and injustice; and during the whole of this period the department, corresponding with Davis, addressed him, sometimes as flag officer and sometimes

as captain commanding *pro tem.*, and the flag was not finally granted to him until after the battle of Memphis, and then not because it was his already by right, but because Foote, recognizing the inevitable, voluntarily relinquished the nominal command, and asked for a leave of absence. Davis had acquiesced in the arrangement, but he did so because he really did not care for such things. He was totally and absolutely free from the mean self-seeking that is the motive of so many in time of war. His acquiescence was an act of generosity and self-abnegation which those who proposed it were quite incapable of either appreciating or understanding, though they were willing enough to profit by it. He was not in the war for the personal advantage which the war might bring to himself. He had a proper professional pride and a decent self-respect, but he knew how to govern his mind, and how to put the right value on all things; "and after all," he writes, "however my mind may be disturbed by a sense of injustice, by disappointment, by professional slights and wrongs, and by private regrets, nothing clouds my distinct perception of the real insignificance of these things in the general scheme of Providence, and my humble and most fearful but trustful dependence upon God, in whose great hands I stand or fall."

Admiral Porter, in commenting on the battle of Memphis says: "For the second time, Rear Admiral Davis won a strictly naval victory, and won it without a single mistake. . . . Take the battle together with its results, it was one of the handsomest achievements of the war, but it did not receive that general notice

which it deserved. If Mr. Secretary Welles, who was liberal with his eulogistic letters to those whom he approved of, ever congratulated Rear Admiral Davis and his officers for their brilliant success, it nowhere appears in the Secretary's report for 1862. But history will eventually give due credit to all the brave men who served their country faithfully in the time of her greatest need. The prejudices and jealousies of the times will have passed away, and the truthful historian, who takes time to examine the records carefully, will give to each his proper place, and render justice to those who have not yet received it."

## CHAPTER XII

### VICKSBURG AND THE RAM ARKANSAS

FOR the causes which led to Flag Officer Farragut's advance up the Mississippi River from New Orleans to Vicksburg, in June, 1862, and for Farragut's own part in the futile attempt to reduce the formidable batteries at that place, the reader may consult Captain Mahan's "Life of Admiral Farragut" (chapter viii.). Farragut had ascended the river against his own judgment, and yielding only to peremptory orders from the Navy Department and the mandate of the commander-in-chief of the army and navy himself. In this premature move upon Vicksburg, the squadrons of both Farragut and Davis were far in advance of their legitimate lines of operation; for the movement of the naval forces upon the inland waters was, or should have been, dependent upon, and in support of, the movements of armies. An attempt to reduce a position like Vicksburg with the navy alone, and without the support and coöperation of a sufficient land force, was simply a waste of life, sure to end in failure, and in mortification to those principally engaged. Davis himself was within the limits of his cruising ground, for by the victory at Memphis he had opened the upper Mississippi to free navigation as far as Vicksburg; but there was

no real military reason for the presence of either squadron at Vicksburg at this time, and for the upper flotilla, as Davis himself had written, there was a large field for work and usefulness in the tributaries. Farragut's sole anxiety after getting above Vicksburg was to get back again without losing his ships, and the same anxiety was felt by the authorities in Washington, which had insisted upon this hazardous and useless move. His orders to return to New Orleans, which were as peremptory as those to ascend the river, were received after he had run the batteries from above. General Williams was forced to withdraw with the small force under his command by the ravages of the epidemic which attacked the troops and the flotilla; so that Davis was abandoned in his precarious situation above the batteries, with his long line of communications seriously threatened, and with his own small force seriously reduced by the loss of two ships which had run the batteries in an attempt to destroy the *Arkansas*. There was of course only one thing left for him to do, namely, to withdraw from an untenable position. In withdrawing he was not in retreat, but was simply falling back on his proper base; yet he seems to have been the only one of the three commanders who was censured, although all three pursued exactly the same course. The responsibility for the *Arkansas* affair was laid solely at his door, though he planned the reconnoissance up the Yazoo; and it was the engagement with the *Carondelet*, one of Davis's own ships, which had so crippled the *Arkansas* that she was powerless to effect any injury to the ships as

she passed through the combined squadrons. Moreover, the course of the *Arkansas* took her down the river, and into the limits of Farragut's station; and, finally, it was the *Essex*, of Davis's own squadron, which destroyed her. So that it would appear that the blame for the escape of the *Arkansas* cannot justly be imputed to Davis, especially as he would have been operating in the tributaries and would probably have destroyed the *Arkansas*, if he had not been engaged in the futile attempt on Vicksburg, of which he was not the author. The *Arkansas* had been built in Memphis, and was unfinished at the time of the evacuation of Fort Pillow, but had been towed down the Mississippi and into the Yazoo River to be completed; and Davis had received reports of her, and was prepared, in a measure, for her appearance. The story of Davis's share in the attempt on Vicksburg may be told in his own language:—

FLAGSHIP BENTON,  
MISSISSIPPI RIVER, June 29, 1862.

We are now below Back Island, on our way to Vicksburg. I have six of the mortar-boats in company, and, if the state of things is correctly described to me, we shall have the city under our fire. It must either surrender or be destroyed. I was in hopes that Farragut would have finished this business himself, as he would have done, but that Lieutenant-Colonel Ellet, the brother of Ram Ellet, went down and communicated with him, when he sent up a message to me to ask my assistance.

He says, "If Commodore Davis's ironclad gunboats could be present, they would greatly add to the chances of success without much loss of life." I feel quite anxious about Mem-

phis. There are only four thousand troops there, and the enemy is in the vicinity. I leave two gunboats at Memphis, two at Fort Pillow, and two in the White River. I have with me only four. It is a long reach of river from Memphis to Vicksburg, — four hundred miles. It will take this boat nearly a week to go back. As soon as Vicksburg is taken, I shall return to Memphis, which I hope to make my headquarters, and then, probably, the old navy yard will be resumed, or a new one established.

You perceive, by my appointment, that I have all the tributaries of the Mississippi under my control; and I have written to Washington to propose the construction, or rather the purchase and suitable equipment, of some steamboats of light draught that can navigate these waters during the dry season, and repel the guerrilla bands, keeping the communications open.

FLAGSHIP BENTON,  
ISLAND No. 76, June 30, 1862.

An opportunity unexpectedly occurs to write you this morning by one of Ellet's rams which is bound up the river.

I have received a long letter from Farragut, in which he says that more troops are required to hold the city after we have silenced the batteries.

General Williams is cutting a ditch across the point where the mortars are marked on the sketch, or somewhat above, to change the course of the river and pass clear of the city. Curious piece of Yankee enterprise.

Above Vicksburg, July 2d. Yesterday was a day of most agreeable excitement. We arrived at this anchorage, which is just above the position of the mortar-boats, but in the middle of the river, at ten o'clock in the morning. Several of Farragut's gunboats were stationed up the river, and we passed them from time to time, before reaching the main body of the fleet.

When we entered upon the line of the lower fleet, every

vessel cheered us as we came abreast, and thus we steamed along the whole line until we had passed the flagship of Commodore Farragut. To each pennant we gave an answering cheer, but to the flag we gave the usual three cheers and a reply; and in this way the two victorious fleets, crowned with the honors of Forts Jackson and Philip, New Orleans, Grand Gulf, and Vicksburg, with Forts Henry and Donelson, Columbus, Island No. 10, Pillow, and Memphis, came together and celebrated their union. You may conceive the interest of this occasion, and its importance, historical and military. Certainly it has been my fortune to witness some exciting scenes,—emotive, to employ a word seldom used. To the navy officers, especially the old ones, there were wanting many sources of excitement shared by others: to the majority of the men and volunteer officers, everything was strange and wonderful. My own people almost lost their senses. Captain Phelps and myself were very much amused at their bewilderment, at the first sight of a fleet of regular men-of-war. Our own gunboats were objects of great curiosity, also, to the men-of-war's men; so were the little tugs. When I passed through the fleets in the *Jessie Benton* to Flag Officer Farragut's ship, to make (being the junior) the first call, with the red flag indicating my rank and presence, the higher decks and ports of every vessel were crowded. I should not have thought beforehand that so striking and exciting a scene could have been created by the meeting of two squadrons.

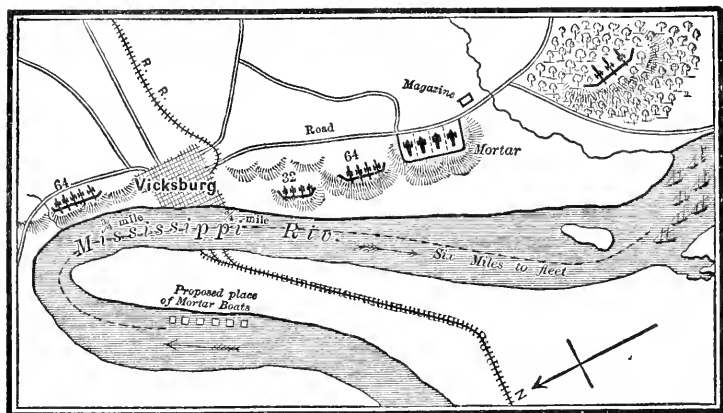
I parted with Commodore Farragut in Port Royal on his way out to his station on the first or second day of March last. Little did I think then that, descending the Mississippi, I should meet him coming up. What obstacles then lay between, and how have they been overcome! You may suppose that our greetings were cordial and hearty,—given and taken with both hands, not one.

And I was touched with the kindness of many old friends, who congratulated me with feeling on our successes and on



my flag. My ship was crowded with visitors. My old friend Phillips Lee, Palmer also, and other old acquaintances, I met.

Now that we have got here, you will wish to know what we are going to do. There is one thing we are not going to do, — we are not going to take Vicksburg without a larger



VICKSBURG.

number of troops. I begin to bombard above immediately; am placing the mortars now. Porter is at work below. But I shall reserve this for the next letter. I am just expecting Commodore Farragut and General Williams on an official visit.

July 4th. The hope at one time danced before our eyes and hearts that we should celebrate this auspicious morning at New Orleans; but, though disappointed in this, we accept our junction in the two fleets as a happy omen. To-day we carry an unusual number of flags, and all fire a salute at twelve o'clock. I promised in my last letter to tell you something about our military status. You will get from the sketch I sent you an idea of the extent of the bluffs on which stands the city of Vicksburg. These bluffs are covered in front with batteries of heavy guns, terraced one above the other,

and the capture and possession of them are impossible, except with a military force. The other morning Farragut dashed by them at daylight with a portion of his squadron, and is still above the town. His list of casualties was small. He can go back at night with little loss. We require twenty thousand men, and perhaps more, to hold Vicksburg. But there is a method of turning all these heavy fortifications and batteries, and of chastising the insolent and corrupt city of Vicksburg, that seems to have been provided by Nature herself. The sketch ought to be altered (to make it correct) by carrying in the shore line above the mortar-boats easterly in a curved direction, so as to create a narrow neck between the two reaches of the river above and below the city. It has always been a subject of apprehension to the religious and enlightened inhabitants of that hell (as gambling-houses are termed in Paris) lest the channel of the river should of its own accord, or by artificial means, take its way across the narrow neck, and thus annihilate Vicksburg by converting the site of the town into the bottom of a shute, instead of the bank of the main channel bordering on deep water. (A shute, in Mississippi River technology, is the subsidiary channel on one side of an island.) It has been proposed to do this by a cut, and the plan has been submitted to the legislature of the State. It was, of course, opposed by the people of Vicksburg, who for all purposes of trade might as well have their town removed five miles back from the bank of the river. So alarmed were they about it that they have even feared their friends the negroes (who were going to fight their battles!) would cut the ditch some dark night. Now General Williams, the military commander here, has so far advanced in cutting the ditch that it will be completed to-morrow night. There are nearly one thousand negroes now at work. It is not a propitious moment for the undertaking, because the river is falling. It is the rising river, the swell and flood of the freshet, that force open these new channels,

after the hard-pan below the soil has been removed and the way opened to the loose sand underlying it. But though the river is now falling at this place, there is promise of a speedy return of the waters. It is reported that the June rise is great, and the rains heavy on the upper Missouri, and that all the upper rivers are in good stage, as the expression is. The swell corresponding to this rise and these rains will soon be here, when we hope for the best results. To add the last word on this subject, the line of survey for the former proposed cut has been identified, and a line of levels, run by General Williams across the neck, showed that at that time (of leveling) the water on this side was three and a half feet higher than on the other.

What a grand result it would be to leave this Hesperian dragon ruminating on what he meant to do, and would do if he could, while the white messengers of peace and commerce passed beyond the reach of his pestiferous breath! A great and bloodless victory! May God, who has been so good to us, grant us his favor in this undertaking.

July 11th. No change has taken place in the state of affairs here since I wrote last, except that the canal is cut and the attempt is to be made to open it this afternoon. The river has fallen continually, with slight pauses, since our arrival, but it is hoped that by putting stern-wheel steamers at the opening on this side, the sides and bottom may be washed in, and the river may be persuaded to enter into its new channel. It is a rather big undertaking, but there is a good deal of faith somewhere. It is again said, in the "Missouri Republican" of the 6th inst., that the Missouri River is rising from its source to the mouth, and that the upper end of the river is very high. One of my oldest and most experienced pilots says that there will be a "big river" (such is the phrase) in ten days or a fortnight. Should this prove to be the case, we shall soon know what the Father of Waters has to say to this attempt to stay and divert his course.

July 14th. Things go on here without variation : it is just as stupid as it was above Fort Pillow, except the society afforded by the lower squadron. The heat exceeds, I think, anything I have ever encountered in the course of my service. But it is not worth while to complain of what cannot be helped. The *Bragg*<sup>1</sup> has got down, and I expect to find my quarters on board of her more cool and quiet. This morning I am going to send a gunboat eighty miles up the Yazoo to reconnoitre and prepare the way for an expedition, which will go up in considerable force if necessary. I have just been sent for, for consultation, on board the *Hartford*, Farragut's ship, and shall put this in an envelope, lest there should be no opportunity to write further before the boat goes.

July 16th. Yesterday was a day of excitement and fatigue, the events of which are likely to make a figure in history. I told you in my last hurried note that I was about fitting out an expedition for the Yazoo, and that I was called suddenly to attend a conference on this subject, — suddenly, but not unexpectedly, for we had held this affair under consideration for some days. Various examinations of the Yazoo, as far as eighty miles from the mouth, had informed us that there was a raft obstructing the passage at that point, with a battery near it below, and the new ram *Arkansas* above, a formidable craft, almost as efficient in design as the *Merri-mac* of terrible renown. But we had every reason to believe that the *Arkansas* was unfinished and aground. Enough of uncertainty prevailed, however, to induce General Williams and myself to agree to a reconnoissance in some force, in order to form a correct idea of the force to be sent up to capture the fort and destroy the *Arkansas*.

Such was our information, and such the state of things, when the party started up the Yazoo (the mouth of which is only six miles from our present anchorage), at four o'clock yesterday morning. This party consisted of the iron gunboat,

<sup>1</sup> One of the vessels captured at Memphis and taken into service.

the *Carondelet*, a wooden gunboat, the *Tyler*, and one of Colonel Ellet's rams. On board the two last were distributed forty sharp-shooters from General Williams's command.

They had only proceeded a few miles up the river when they met this devil, the *Arkansas*, coming down, — an ugly customer, well protected, almost invulnerable, with a heavy battery in casemate. An action began which resulted in the *Carondelet* being injured and run aground, the *Tyler* being severely injured and driven off, and the ram (not commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Ellet in person) leaving without a show of fight, which called down some hard names on her captain, who seems to have had what the pilots call a "big scare" on him.

The *Arkansas*, making her way after the flying enemy, came down the Mississippi through our combined fleet, serving her guns with great effect, and defying danger or interruption. It was certainly a very exciting and pleasing sight so far as the gallantry of the thing was concerned, but a little too tantalizing for the numerous men-of-war, secure in their very numbers, who were lying idle, helpless, motionless, without steam, and without means of resistance, except that of firing their broadsides as the ironclad rascal went by.

The rapid and continuous firing in the river Yazoo, plainly heard by us, excited some suspicion, but we, most of us, came to the conclusion that the firing was upon guerrilla parties only. But Captain Phelps was the first to apprehend something serious, and sent to me for permission to raise the steam. We had then only thirty pounds of steam, and required sixty to move. We fired up, but before we could move — and this vessel was the first, and, with one exception, the only man-of-war under way — the ram was far below us and out of reach; she had passed below the batteries. It is impossible to say what injury she sustained.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "When the *Arkansas* reached the fleet, her smoke-stack had been so often perforated by the *Carondelet's* shot that her boilers could scarcely

She seemed at one time to be very much crippled, and I made sure of her; but she managed to escape. Having followed her down to the point, I engaged the upper battery. Shortly afterwards, I went down with Farragut again, to show him the position of the battery, and in the evening, as I shall tell you, again.

If you remember what I have previously told you of Commodore Farragut, you may imagine his excitement at this scene of mortification and rebel triumph. He desired to make it worse by putting his whole command in all sorts of perilous positions, and treated my reason as very cold and repulsive. The contrast between us was very striking, though perfectly friendly. During the day he decided to run by the batteries, and take care of the remainder of his fleet below. I covered his passage by the upper batteries for an hour; this made the fourth time I was under fire during the day. The old *Benton* was struck in the hull a dozen times, but only one man was killed, and two wounded and ten missing.

I thought after the morning at Memphis I had done with rams, but here this scamp has come to keep us again in a state of excitement and apprehension.

July 18th. You may imagine that, since the escapade of the rebel ram, we have passed an uncomfortable time. After such a calamity there is a great disposition to find fault, and to impute blame to some one. On such occasions a scapegoat must be found. Those whose pride and self-love are wounded, or who fear censure and are anxious to anticipate it, have a way of hiding their own share in the transaction, either by a direct charge, or by concealing the true issue. I shall resort to none of these devices. I have been fortunate, and am content to suffer misfortune. Shall I receive good, and not evil, at the hands of the Lord?

supply any steam. Her speed was thereby reduced to one knot, powerless to ram and scarcely sufficient to steer." *Vide Captain Mahan's Life of Admiral Farragut*, p. 191.

What annoys me is that Farragut invites me to join him in placing both squadrons under the guns of the batteries, thus risking the great trust we hold, to indulge a momentary spleen. I fear that I shall be dragged into a violation of my clearest sense of duty by his impetuosity. Conceive the fatal consequences of the loss of this six hundred miles of river, the control of which is the result of five months of hard fighting and patient waiting, by the army and navy, through violent days and weary nights. And yet he writes me that he wants to go in "regardless of consequences"! The loss of the Mississippi River at this time, after the repulse at Richmond, would postpone the termination of the war indefinitely, spread panic throughout the Northwest, interrupt business, lower stocks, and provoke foreign interference; but, above all, it would give such encouragement to the rebels, and so entirely dishearten our friends in the South, that the hope of putting down this rebellion in any reasonable time would be lost. And yet my friend the admiral says we are to act "regardless of consequences." This is the language of a Hotspur, and not of one that hath a rule over his own spirit; with such counsels, we shall soon be like a city that is broken down and without walls. My own conceptions of duty are so clear and distinct that I shall not forget my paramount obligations to my country to gratify a feeling of resentful pride.

Yet you must not think that Farragut and I differ unkindly. Nothing can exceed his kindness, candor, and liberality; our old ties have been strengthened by our present intercourse. He is a man who unites with a bold and impetuous spirit an affectionate temper, and a generous and candid nature.

We have kept our mortars very busy lately, firing at the rebel ram and gunboat *Arkansas*, which is kept uneasy by our shells. She was injured by shot the morning she passed here, and our bombs prevent the work of repair from going on during the day. Yesterday we drove the workmen away

by the terror of our explosions ; they were forced back at the point of the bayonet. But work, under such conditions, is not likely to be well and expeditiously done. We are aiming to destroy the *Arkansas* by the falling bombs, and we come very near it when they explode in such close proximity to her as to oblige every one to abandon her while the firing continues. Yesterday we sunk a wharf-boat (as it is called), lying within three hundred yards of her ; the boat was struck twice and destroyed. If the same good luck would attend us in hitting the *Arkansas*, we should be relieved from anxiety on account of this unwelcome stranger. We shall keep at work.

I believe I said nothing in my last of the shot that came through us on the 15th. One passed through the iron-plated side without difficulty, and, after taking off the head of a man close to the shoulders, destroyed the cabin kitchen, Captain Phelps's room, and my own room, finally lodging in the very centre of my bed. I have saved the shot, and hope to bring it home with me one of these days.

July 23d. I must not disguise from you that our troubles down here are not diminished. An attempt yesterday morning, as we thought well and deliberately planned, to destroy the *Arkansas*, failed through various causes, though it resulted in doing her some injury. The attempt has left me worse off than before. The guerrillas are beginning to trouble us on the river ; several of our mail-boats have been fired into, and one, we fear, has been sunk. I keep at the *Arkansas* with the mortars steadily, and have hit her three or four times, but not a smashing blow. We make her state very disagreeable, and keep her constantly in motion. She showed herself round the point this morning, and we were in hopes she was coming up. I have no doubt that we shall drive her to a state of frenzy. The fact is, our situation is unpleasant, knowing, especially, how they are growling at us at home.

July 25th. The two last days have been delightful ; the thermometer has come down to 90° in the shade ; there is a



breeze, and at night a sheet is not oppressive. Sailing rapidly against the wind in one of the tugs produces a chilly sensation. This is good for our poor sick, who, the doctor tells me this morning, number forty per cent. of all our people, and increase at the rate of four or five per cent. a day, on board this ship alone, where we are particularly healthy, — four or five per cent. of the remaining healthy people. I am so disabled by the remittent and intermittent fevers of the climate that I think of moving up the river. Flag Officer Farragut went down the river yesterday. General Williams also went down yesterday, by which movement our communication with the lower river is cut off. I have lost control of my vessels below. I urged General Williams to stay, but he replied that his orders precluded the exercise of choice, and that, if this were not so, he should not venture to remain, on account of the effect of the climate on his troops. He brought, he said, thirty-two hundred men with him, and carries away only eight hundred effective. The other three fourths have died from exposure and the climate, or are now in the hospital. Lately, ten have died in a day; it is like a pestilence. The ram fleet is in the same condition.

You would be astonished to see how utterly it prostrates the patients sick with fever. A large man rises to walk ten steps and falls down like a baby, fainting away.

Mississippi River, July 31st. In my last letter I believe I gave you a short account of our last attempt to destroy the *Arkansas*. It was a failure in every way. There was a want of coöperation, most unaccountable, on the part of Commodore Farragut, by which one important vessel was not brought into the action, and by which the support of his squadron was withheld.

I was informed by Flag Officer Farragut, immediately after the last attack on the *Arkansas*, that he intended to move down the river at once, in obedience to orders from the department; and, at the same moment, I learned from report

that General Williams was to accompany him with the troops under his command. I wrote to General Williams urging him to remain and keep open communication above and below Vicksburg by railroad, the means for constructing which were at hand. He replied that his orders obliged him to go, and that without them he would be compelled to move, on account of the disabled condition of his command. He had brought with him thirty-two hundred men, of which twenty-four hundred were dead or in the hospital. He could only muster eight hundred effective men and officers.

His departure rendered it necessary that I should abandon the position I then held, because it gave the enemy the possession of the point from the ditch down. General Williams has, in making the canal, converted it into a means of defense by constructing a continued breastwork and rifle-pit on the lower border, and introducing an angle, where the levee crossed the canal on the upper border, so as to enfilade it.

It was, therefore, no longer safe for my hospital, commissary, and ordnance boats to lie at the bank as they had done. I therefore moved up with my whole command to the mouth of the Yazoo. Vicksburg being thus abandoned above and below by the fleets and the army, I had to determine on my next step.

I had allowed the ram *Sumter*<sup>1</sup> to go down with Farragut, not only to assist in the attack on the *Arkansas*, but to assist also in maintaining the blockade of that vessel below; and in the same manner, and with the same motive, I consented to the *Essex* going down. I supposed that Commodore Farragut might go down, — he told me that he had urged the department to allow him to do so, — but it never entered my head that I should be deserted by the army; and it was my expectation to blockade the town on both sides, keeping up the communication between the two detachments of my squadron across the neck.

<sup>1</sup> One of the vessels captured at Memphis and taken into the service.

Now, however, the *Essex* and *Sumter* were wholly lost to me. They would be obliged to go to Baton Rouge or New Orleans for supplies. The communications in my rear were so seriously threatened that they could only be kept open by gunboats, and my light and fleet gunboats were all under repairs. One of my mail-boats had been sunk near Island 82, under circumstances not known, and several had been fired into by horse artillery. Thus my supplies and mails were cut off, except they were sent under convoy, which convoy I could not give.

I received information from a reliable source, and of a circumstantial character, that heavy guns were transported across the Yazoo to be carried to the vicinity of Island 94, or Island 92; flying artillery was taken from bank to bank on the great bends of the river and used twice on the same vessel; a small battery was reported at or near Greenville; and small guns and muskets in the hands of guerrilla parties had been fired at our vessels from several points between Gaines's Landing and Carolina Landing. The same thing had occurred at and above Napoleon. We had heard repeatedly that Price was crossing from Mississippi into Arkansas to make a junction with Hindman, and General Curtis had asked for gunboats.

My squadron had been reduced to a comparatively weak condition. Both the vessels engaged with the *Arkansas* in the Yazoo River had been sent to Cairo for repairs, and, having lost the *Essex* and the *Sumter*, I was reduced to the *Benton*, the *Cincinnati* in a sinking condition, the *Louisville*, and the ram *General Bragg*.

Sickness had made sudden and terrible havoc with my people. It came, as it were, all at once. Ten and fifteen cases were added to the sick-list every day for several days; and though many patients were discharged every day, and though the usual course of the fever was short, yet the attack was invariably followed by extreme debility; the efficiency of

the vessel was greatly impaired, and she was converted into a hospital, her decks on one side especially being crowded with cots and hammocks.

The other vessels had suffered in the same way. The hospital boat had one hundred and fifty patients, and was thronged. Every transport and other vessel was more or less disabled, and, as for the ordnance boat of the mortar-fleet, she had, I think, eighty men on their backs. These poor fellows (the mortar-men) died in the most mysterious manner. They would be apparently well at evening, and enjoy their supper, and during the night sink away and pass off without pain. The surgeon told me he was afraid the fever would assume a more serious type, — it would pass in time from one *mittent* to another, from *inter* to *re* or the reverse, and thence to typhoid, and from that to bilious congestive, and so on to whatever there may be that is worse. He is an old practitioner in these parts. He wanted to move up very much, and wrote me a letter to that effect. The symptoms of the scurvy enhanced the pleasures of the scene.

Taking into consideration all these things, I determined to return up the river as far as Helena, and am on my way there now. This decision is my own. I talked the matter over with one or two persons, but called no council of war. The responsibility is my own, and it will not worry me the least in the world if it is not approved of. Every prudent general keeps open the road in his rear by which he receives his communications and supplies. It is as good generalship at one time to fall back as at another to advance; and he who obstinately persists in maintaining a position, by which he himself is the loser and the enemy the gainer, is worthy to be written down an ass. It was not to be expected that I could take the city of Vicksburg with my squadron only, without troops; and, this being so, I am as well at Helena as at any point lower down.

But you must distinctly understand one thing, — that I am

not giving up the possession of any part of the river I now hold by falling back to Helena. Between Helena and Vicksburg there are no bluffs, no high land suited to fortifications. Guns can only be placed in position on the level bank, where, to be sure, the levee often serves as a breastwork; but they will have no advantage of ground, and our fire will easily dislodge them. I shall return down the river with the men-of-war when the *Eastport* joins me.

There was one painful circumstance attending our leaving Vicksburg. General Williams had collected negroes from the plantations for a hundred miles above, to work on the ditch or canal; among them were women and children. When he went down the river he was obliged to leave them to take care of themselves. We took some of them, and supplied the others with provisions, and persuaded them to go home. They were in terrible distress, — fearful of being whipped, if not killed, notwithstanding that they had been taken from home by force.

I have brought up the river with me a large fleet of impedimenta, coal and ice barges, tugs, and mortar-boats included. Some of the officers tried very hard to persuade me to throw the latter overboard, on account of their retarding our movements so much. They are nothing but deep, square boxes, carrying a dead weight of twenty-five tons each. They are a terrible drag, but I declined to listen to the proposition, if it took me ten days to get up the river. To throw overboard any guns would have given to my falling back to Helena — a measure of prudence merely — the character of a hasty retreat, or flight even. I was on my cruising-ground, and it was of no importance how long it took me to make the passage. Fortunately I had coal enough, for I had taken off of Farragut's hands the coal he sent for, which arrived after he passed below the town. I have now brought them two hundred and seventy miles, and am only thirty miles below Helena. But the detention has been less than was feared.

I doubt if they retarded our progress much after the tow-boats learned how to take hold of them. If nothing happens, we shall reach Helena to-night (Thursday) ; we left the mouth of the Yazoo last Saturday at about three o'clock.

I have experienced some anxiety during the time from having so many helpless vessels in the fleet, and from being so utterly helpless myself in one respect, — I mean in the power of moving. If the *Arkansas* had run up into the midst of our squadron, she could have caused unutterable distress. We should have been as likely to injure friend as foe, while she, having only foes around her, could never have fired amiss. But in our last attack the shot of the *Essex* made a hole in her side several feet long, and she was otherwise in need of repairs. Her captain, Brown, formerly a lieutenant in our navy, has his home up here about six miles from Helena ; a fine plantation, Phelps tells me, who was once intimate with him, sailed and messed with him, and was fond of him. He may be showing himself up here, flourishing off in his old haunts. He can trust to his superior speed if the *Eastport* does not come, and he knows, no doubt, that the old *Benton* is slow to wrath, though able to say a good word for herself when she reaches the scene of action. You will wonder how she has made her way upstream against the strong current of the Mississippi. She had the fast and powerful side-wheel boat *Switzerland* tugging at her on one side and the *General Bragg* on the other. With these two large and heavy boats shoving her along, she cannot go faster than the mortar-boats are towed.

As we approach Helena I am satisfied, from the reports received from the transports, towing vessels, etc., that if we had remained a week longer at Vicksburg I should not have had engineers nor firemen enough to bring the vessels up. As it is, we have depended very much on the contrabands to do the work in front of the fires.

Helena, Friday, August 1st. I anchored here last evening

at eight o'clock with the whole fleet. I have not dropped a coal barge on the way, though you may well suppose that we had a tedious time of it. There is no knowing what crazy project the department may have in view, or how this move of mine may be taken. But it seems to me that the only course now to be pursued is to yield to the climate, and postpone any further action at Vicksburg till the fever season is over. This childish impatience I have no sympathy with, and I have as little with that absurd state of mind that refuses to recognize and accept a disappointment or a misfortune. "Shall we accept the good, and cavil at the ill?" if my memory serves me to quote right. Some natures seem never to rise to the dignity of self-command.

The Navy Department had been obliged to abandon its project for the reduction of Vicksburg; in fact, the premature demonstration and the junction of the two fleets was probably intended rather to produce a moral effect at the North than with any idea of military success. But if that were the case, the effect was immediately lost, and the attempt had produced no effect whatever on the enemy. Whatever the desires of the government may have been, the climate of the summer months and the low stage of the waters in the Western rivers put an effectual stop to further operations with the flotilla until the cool weather returned. From Helena Davis returned to Cairo, the headquarters of the flotilla, for conference with the military authorities, and for a general repair of his ships during the period of forced inactivity; and he had no sooner got there than he fell ill himself with the fever of the climate. Fortunately this illness occurred at a place where he was able to move out of

his ship and find sick-quarters on shore ; and he passed nearly three weeks in the house of Captain Pennock, the commandant of the naval station at Cairo, under a severe attack of the fever and in slow convalescence. The latter was favored by a change, in the middle of August, from the intense heat of the summer to the first cool breath of autumn, and while still confined to the commandant's house at Cairo he writes, under date of August 16th : —

A change has come over the weather here. Night before last there was an exceedingly violent storm, and yesterday and to-day the weather has been more than cool. Last night I slept under a light coverlid and blanket. The change is so extreme that it is almost uncomfortable. But it is impossible to complain after the heat. I never can describe to you that heat, particularly at Vicksburg. There are days with us, you know, in midsummer, when the air is perfectly still and breathless, and one gasps for breath. Imagine a continued succession of such days, — long, long, weary, red-hot, gasping days, that seem as if they made no progress at all, as if they would never end. And then to go below into an atmosphere warmer than the upper air, like a kitchen or drying-room, and all night to swelter in the same heat, — I shall never forget it as long as I live. I believe I may thank God that the worst of it is over. The climate at Helena is much more mild and healthy than at Vicksburg, and we are not likely to go to Vicksburg again for the present, or, if so, for a short time only.

I told you that General Curtis and I came up here together on business. The object of our coming was to persuade the government to let us make a combined movement on Vicksburg. General Curtis's troops are fresh and healthy, and if it were done suddenly it would be attended with suc-



cess. The government declined. It was getting an army ready, it said, for Vicksburg; and I imagine it means to avoid exposing new troops to a climate that has the reputation of being very dangerous to strangers at this season of the year. But Vicksburg is doomed.

During his stay at Cairo Davis had the pleasure of hearing of the destruction of the ram *Arkansas*. The two gunboats, the *Essex* and *Sumter*, which he had sent down to attack the ram as she lay at the bank under the Vicksburg batteries, had been unable through lack of speed to force their way up again past the batteries and against the strong current of the river, and remained below, and became part of Farragut's squadron. They had continued to patrol the river between Vicksburg and Baton Rouge, which latter point was held by General Williams. The enemy attacked by land, supported by the *Arkansas* and two gunboats. Farragut came up the river with a part of his squadron, but before he arrived at Baton Rouge the enemy had been repulsed, though General Williams was killed; and the *Arkansas* was attacked and destroyed by Captain W. D. Porter in the *Essex*, who had been directed by Davis, before the interruption of his communications across the neck at Vicksburg by the withdrawal of General Williams, to cruise between Baton Rouge and Vicksburg, to look out for the *Arkansas*, and to attack her if she could be reached. Thus the destruction of this formidable vessel was the act of one of Davis's captains, executing his specific orders.

Before leaving Cairo Davis shifted his flag to the *Eastport*, a finer and more commodious vessel than

the *Benton*, and much superior to the latter in speed, though not so heavily armed. The *Eastport* was fitted as a ram, and it may be said that the ram in naval warfare was developed on the Mississippi River, where the narrow waters gave an advantage to vessels of high speed in such tactics, although the real superiority of ordnance over the ram had been demonstrated in the battles of Fort Pillow and Memphis.

FLAGSHIP EASTPORT,

Near HELENA, September 5, 1862.

*Near* Helena, you perceive, not *at* Helena. I have had such a time getting down here! owing to the low stage of the water in the river. Among the acquisitions growing out of these troublous times, to me one of the newest and most interesting is a knowledge of some of the peculiarities, the most prominent habits, of our respected relative, the Father of the Western Waters. He is just now in a very humble stage of his fortunes, and the meagre contrast he presents to his condition when he was girded to the hips and overflowing in May last, when I first took command of the flotilla, is very striking. Then there was not a bit of land to be seen, except at the high bluffs here and there, nothing but trees. It was like the time of the deluge: there was not a resting-place for the foot. It was *magna componere parvis*, like the sides of a channel when the tide is up. One might penetrate in a boat far up into the woods, or *timber*, as they call it here; while now it is only vessels of the smallest draught that can sail fearlessly and without danger of interruption from point to point. When the Father of Waters shrinks away in this manner, and his territory becomes altogether too wide for his shrunken proportions, he wastes his weakened force by letting it run in a number of small channels. At this time he travels with considerable volume and velocity, perhaps, a long

reach of his course, and then he will come to a point when he begins to spread and diffuse and sprawl out into shallow, difficult streams and impassable bars. His last stage of decline, on which he is just now entering, is that of "cutting out," it is called. In this he is now employed, in improving one of the shallow channels at the expense of the others.

At the very end of the season the river is, on account of this "cutting out" process, really better than at the time of the falling of the waters; for then, while the channels have deteriorated simultaneously, in the latter case some one of them receives a larger flow of water than the rest, and maintains a useful depth.

We are at the worst stage, and the whole passage from Cairo to this place has been replete with anxiety. We got on shore the second afternoon, and remained aground till one o'clock the next morning, working hard in the ways peculiar to the river. One of these ways is, or consists in, getting a large, heavy spar on the bottom, at the end of the vessel hardest ashore, and in raising the vessel by means of it from the bottom, while other steamers, at the same time, drag and push her in the way she is to go. This was tried with us, but for some time without success; and it began to be thought that she was too heavy to be moved in that way. The river steamers are light,—light in their frame, light in their upper works, light everywhere. But this vessel is a great mass of iron, apparently defying any ordinary effort to move her. The struggle lasted so long that at last I made up my mind that in the morning I would pack up my valise and go on board of one of the other steamers, bidding good-by to my *Eastport*, for which I had waited so long, and from which I had expected so much. This would have been, indeed, a heavy disappointment! But I was prepared to go. At nine the vessel began to move, and at twelve she swung sensibly; at one we were once more at anchor in deep water, or "no bottom," as the pilots say here when it is over the

measured length of their lines, — four fathoms. From that time to this we have touched repeatedly, and I have had before me the constant apprehension of having the *Eastport* in the mud or sand until the next rise of the river.

So far from enjoying my new ship freely and spontaneously, I enjoyed it as a man enjoys an elegant mansion in the city, or a comfortable home like ours in the country, which he has received notice to quit. I began to think that I should be satisfied if I could get her as far as Memphis, where she would be safe, at least, and where I could go on board of one of the old gunboats.

In the meantime it was rather awkward and inconvenient to have thirty-five hundred prisoners under one's charge, and to be every now and then in a helpless condition. But even this was not the worst of our misfortunes. Suddenly one of our boilers sprang a leak, and put out the fires of the furnaces. We were obliged to lie at anchor a day to ascertain the cause and apply the remedy. The cause was, that, owing to the inherent weakness of the vessel (she is an old hull, a prize, built upon), or to the violence and peculiar direction of her striking the bottom, the bottom had begun to rise in the middle, under the boilers. The keelson was broken upwards, and the whole floor of the vessel disturbed in that place. This was reduced by pressing it back with a heavy weight of iron, — several tons, — and making the necessary repairs on the boilers, the bottoms of which had been pressed in by the rising of the floor on which they were supported. With all these trials, delays, and apprehensions we finally reached Helena. But here I am stopped peremptorily. The town is in sight only two miles off, but a bar separates us from it effectually, so that this evening, finding it impossible to go farther, I have sent forward the convoy under another gunboat.

I am in daily expectation of the other vessels of the convoy, and, if I get over the bar in time, shall still go myself to Vicksburg.

Above Helena, September 8th. On my way down here, I received a very long visit from General W. T. Sherman, not T. W., our old *compagnon de voyage* to Port Royal, of whom I may say, in a word, that he seems to have run out his career to the extreme end.<sup>1</sup> His brother officer of the same name, who came to see me in Memphis, and who is a major-general and a very distinguished officer, told me that Brigadier-General Sherman had gone to the mountains of Pennsylvania; that he is an odd person, thought he could not get along with volunteers, and, as the army is composed mostly of volunteers, he had given it up and retired. I may as well mention here that he has published a defense (I have not seen it) of his conduct in Port Royal, in which he has made an attack on the navy. This was injudicious. Without helping his own cause, he has made enemies uselessly. Besides, these uncalled-for defenses are blunders. *Qui s'excuse s'accuse*. Let us reverse the order of the alphabet and take up W. T., the major-general, who has no occasion to write explanations. He is a very agreeable person, and I was very much gratified with making his acquaintance. Our intercourse placed us in harmony with each other concerning the business of the river, one bank of which, for an indefinite distance, is controlled by him, under the orders of General Grant. He tells me that it is the policy of the government at home to hold on here to what they have got, and not to undertake any active measures, except against the guerrillas, until affairs nearer home are brought into a more favorable condition. The fear of the climate has no doubt a great deal to do with this decision. This is the worst month, especially as low as Vicksburg, the month of chills and of bad fevers.

The short remainder of Davis's service in command of the Mississippi flotilla may be summed up in a very few words. The *Eastport* remained at her anchorage

<sup>1</sup> See footnote, p. 198.

above Helena, prevented from moving down by the low stage of the river, until the 20th of September, when Davis was recalled to Cairo, by an order of the department, to effect the transfer of the flotilla from army to navy control. The worst season, when active operations were impossible, was chosen for this business, and at its conclusion Davis was relieved by Rear Admiral Porter and recalled to Washington. He had received his commission as first chief of the new Bureau of Navigation in July, while still before Vicksburg; but he had declined to relinquish his command at the time, or as long as there was a prospect of a renewal of the attack. He yielded now, partly no doubt on account of his health, but also to the insistence of the department. He had been in constant private correspondence with Mr. Fox, and occasionally with Mr. Welles, and both had expressed a decided wish that he should return to the department. He himself says: "There are many reasons for being satisfied to leave the squadron just now; one of them is that there are reasons for thinking that there will not be much, if any, more fighting on the river. I look back with satisfaction to the employments and successes of the last seventeen months, — the labors in Washington; the victory of Port Royal, in which, from its first conception to its final execution, I had so large a share; the fight at Fort Pillow; and the capture of Memphis. These are much more than my share, taking into account the chances of war. There are so many, of all those who have sought active service with equally as much eagerness as myself, who have failed to take

part in any of the important naval events of the rebellion through the accident of the time! Besides, my own two fights are the only strictly naval battles of the war.

"This life on the river is very lonely. I am glad to return."

In the order detaching him from the command the Secretary wrote: "The department selects this period to make the transfer, when operations nearly cease from the low stage of the water and the employment elsewhere of the coöperating military force. The zeal, ability, and success displayed whilst you have commanded the naval force on the Western waters has frequently received the commendation of the department and the approval of the country."

In July, 1862, an act of Congress reorganized the navy and created the new grades, which have remained pretty much the same to the present day. Before this, there had been only three grades of commissioned officers, — captains, commanders, and lieutenants. There had never been, in the navy itself, any real necessity for an increase in the number of the lower grades; the titles of two of the newly established grades had no naval significance whatever, and of two more the names were used in a perverted sense; but the change was acceptable to the service, because it set at rest the vexed question of assimilated rank with the officers of the army, at a time when the army and navy were in constant coöperation. Moreover, it established a permanent grade of flag officer, which the navy had long wished for. Early in October, 1861, the President had

assigned to the then existing temporary rank of flag officer the assimilated rank of major-general in the army; but the newly created grade of rear admiral made the rank of the flag officer permanent, and was very welcome to the service; and the increase in the total number of grades, together with the forced retirement of officers after forty-five years of service, held out the delusive hope of rapid promotion.

By the operation of the new law, Davis became a commodore from July 16, 1862, the date of the passage of the act; and, the old law relating to flag rank being still in force, he was, during the period of his command on the Mississippi, an acting rear admiral, and no change was made in the form of his flag.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE BUREAU OF NAVIGATION

THE Bureau of Navigation, to the head of which Davis was now called, is one of the principal administrative branches of the Navy Department, and owes its origin and establishment largely to Davis's own exertions. The plan of this bureau was to bring under one head all the scientific departments of the navy related to hydrography, astronomy, navigation, and surveying, with their correlative details; to include the "Nautical Almanac," the Observatory, and the Naval Academy; the latter not only as an educational institution which might properly be classed among the scientific establishments of the service, but also because the academy had been endowed with an excellently equipped astronomical observatory, from which something serious in the way of scientific investigation, and in collaboration with the Naval Observatory in Washington, was confidently expected.

These various branches, except the Naval Academy, had been heretofore administered by the Bureau of Ordnance, which was designated the Bureau of Ordnance and Hydrography, until the establishment of the independent Bureau of Navigation. The Hydrographic Office was in one with the Naval Observatory, and,

under the superintendency of Maury, the office had been engaged almost exclusively in hydrographical work. Gillis, who succeeded Maury in 1861 as superintendent, had restored astronomy to its legitimate ascendancy at the Observatory, and, as far as the hydrographical branch was concerned, the office was a mere depot of charts, most of them of foreign production. It was Davis's plan to separate the two branches, and to create an independent hydrographic office under the Bureau of Navigation. He succeeded in this, and, although the law which established the Hydrographic Office was not passed until 1866, it passed in the language in which the original bill had been drawn by Davis himself, and the new office was, like the "Nautical Almanac" and the Bureau of Navigation, his own creation.

The bureau itself was intended by him to cover only the administration of the scientific branches of the naval service. But, by the act of the department, it was made also to include the Office of Detail. This was presumably on account of Davis's familiarity with the work of that office through his connection with it in 1861. The two branches were in no way allied, and their association was incongruous; but, passing through successive permutations, the bureau has at the present time entirely lost the scientific character which was the chief reason of its being, and the name itself has become a misnomer. The Bureau of Navigation is now the office of detail and nothing more. In fact, this change began immediately on Admiral Davis's relief in 1865, and the bureau has never had a scientific chief

since. A book modeled somewhat on the British "Admiralty Manual of Scientific Inquiry," to which much eminent talent had contributed, and which was intended by Davis as an incentive and guide to officers of the navy in the employment of leisure time on foreign cruises, was suppressed by a successor, not because of any pretended judgment on the merits of the book itself or its object, but as an act of personal hostility toward its author. The whole history of the Bureau of Navigation affords an illustration of the makeshift methods, instability of purpose, and caprice, which take the place of knowledge, experience, custom, system, and a defined policy, in naval administration; and Davis's connection with it exemplifies the futility which often attends individual effort, no matter how well directed, under such a system.

Davis remained in the Navy Department from November, 1862, until April, 1865. Besides his duties in the bureau, he was, by request of the board, a member of the Lighthouse Board; he still continued to serve on harbor commissions; he served on a board on plans and designs for new vessels; as member of a board on parole of prisoners; of a board on steam expansion, then before the invention of the compound engine, a much-vexed question; and he was, *ex officio*, a member of the permanent board of bureau chiefs which acted in an advisory capacity to the Secretary of the Navy. He was also associated with Professors Henry and Bache as a member of a permanent commission to which were referred all questions of science and art upon which the department might require advice, with power to call in

associates to aid in its investigations and inquiries. This commission was no sinecure, and was constantly in session, for it was at this time that mechanical and scientific ingenuity was beginning to be felt in application to naval construction and equipment, and to this commission were referred the innumerable plans and proposals for new inventions and devices with which the government at Washington was flooded. This commission is interesting because it led to the establishment of the National Academy of Sciences, as will be seen by the letters which follow.

The vote of thanks for the victories of Fort Pillow and Memphis was signed by the President on February 7, 1863, and this act made Davis a rear admiral, his commission bearing the same date. The rear admirals so far created under the law of July, 1862, were Farragut, Goldsborough, Du Pont, Foote, Davis, and Dahlgren, in the order named. Davis subsequently received the thanks of his native state in a resolution of the General Court of Massachusetts.

As long as Davis remained at the head of the bureau he continued to live alone in Washington, while his family remained in Cambridge. He wrote home almost every day; but his letters, like those written in 1861, were often too personal for publication. In his comments on passing events, the personal allusions are necessarily suppressed in the following extracts, except in some cases where historical interest and the public nature of the event itself seems to justify personal comment:—

November 27, 1862. I am in many instances struck with the arbitrary impulse, or caprice, which has so much to do

with the administration of the department, and which seems to be so regardless of rule or system. This bureau was expressly founded, or established, for the purpose of taking charge of the academy, together with the observatory, "Nautical Almanac," etc. The department asked the naval committees to create the bureau for this purpose. And the academy is taken away<sup>1</sup> from it, without explanation, after the bureau is created. It is fortunate that I don't care for these things; that I feel a real indifference to them, to which indifference I school myself every day and night of my life by reflection and study,—otherwise I should be rendered uncomfortable by these caprices of a power which pays no respect to the claims of service.

But I must confess that no reflection or philosophy can guard me from the uneasiness and sense of insecurity to which the repeated exercise of this capriciousness gives rise. The habitual indulgence of caprice has the same effect as the want of principle.

November 28th. I hear General McClellan spoken of by some of my associates in Washington differently from what we have been accustomed to hear in Cambridge. An army officer whom I have always regarded as his friend, and who I believe is so at this moment, said to me yesterday that McClellan is a thorough student of military science and art, and intimately acquainted with the history of war, ancient and modern; but is, on account of his very study and information, wanting in promptness and decision. Battles have been lost and won in so many different ways, and through such a variety of accidents, that an ingenious and well-read man, when he has made a plan of battle, can discover the means of defeating it, and confirm his apprehensions by examples from history. "McClellan's very knowledge," said my friend, "disqualifies him for action, for he is deficient in the original genius which makes the native-born soldier. This defeat of

<sup>1</sup> It was subsequently restored during Davis's tenure.

action arising from too curious a contemplation of the event is more common in military than civil life, owing to the more critical nature of the case in the former than in the latter." Not having any opinion of my own on the subject I am obliged to go by the opinions of others.

November 30th. Last night I went to Bache's, to the club, and took Captain Lesoffsky<sup>1</sup> with me. Mr. Henry, General Meigs, General Casey, Mr. Bache, and one or two others are valuable companions ; but this club is not like ours at Cambridge. It has its exceptions.

I was struck with what Captain Lesoffsky said to Bache last night about my appearance on the Mississippi. I am sure I must have looked sick and pale, and must have shown signs of weakness that I was not conscious of. He has spoken repeatedly of the change in my appearance. Yet I had no idea of giving up. I am glad of it. I wanted to come home ; had no pleasure whatever, on the contrary only pain, in remaining out there. But I saw my duty clearly.

I have said in one of my preceding notes that I had something more to tell you, and the last sentence I just wrote reminds me of it in this way, that I have wondered whether, if I had been situated as Captain Missroon was in York River (which I will presently describe to you), I should have come up to the mark. The story is this : When the siege of Yorktown began, Missroon commanded a small detachment of good-sized and heavy-armed vessels in York River. He was solicited, urged, and ordered, by General McClellan, the President, and the department to run by the batteries at Yorktown and Gloucester Point. He could not be persuaded to do it. He said that there were fifty-odd guns mounted on the two sides, and it was impossible to get the vessels by. When Yorktown was taken, it was found that there were only four thirty-two-pounder guns commanding the channel. If Captain Missroon had gone by, the siege of Yorktown and

<sup>1</sup> Russian naval attaché.

its delay and expense would have been saved; the enemy's left flank would have been turned, and he would have been thrown into confusion, and driven either into a flight or a surrender; Richmond would have been captured; and five hundred millions of dollars would have been spared to the country. This is the way I hear the case stated by Mr. Fox and others. Missroon got sick a second time (he had done the same thing when in Du Pont's squadron), and was relieved and went home. To make the matter worse, much, very much worse, batteries of far greater strength had been encountered and passed by Du Pont's and Farragut's squadrons in wooden ships.

If Captain Missroon had passed these batteries, — and it now appears that he might have done so with slight if any loss, — he would have been made an admiral. He enjoyed a high reputation at the beginning of the war, very high, especially as a fighting man. He had earned it in part by earnest and clever talking on that subject. A great deal was expected from him; his opinions were quoted as authority; and the department, having confidence in his judgment and activity, had placed him in a situation of danger and responsibility, and told him to go ahead. Just before he left Port Royal to come home, Du Pont, who had sailed a cruise with him in 1837-40 or thereabouts, and had always remained a correspondent and particular friend of his, said to me, "Have *we* been mistaken in this gentleman so many years?" To which I answered, "Don't say *we*, Frank;" for I had sailed with him previous to this, in 1834-35, when we were messmates, and had not formed so high an estimate of his nature as Du Pont had done. He had been less cautious with me, and had no doubt improved before he became Du Pont's messmate.

February 2, 1863. How much have I told you, if anything, about a Permanent Commission or Academy? Bache, Henry, and myself are very busy on this topic, and have

made a move which will no doubt result in the Permanent Commission. The Academy is more doubtful.

February 20th. Inclosed is a copy of the order creating the Permanent Commission. But the Academy is to be introduced into Congress by Mr. Wilson.<sup>1</sup> The whole plan of it was arranged last night between Mr. Wilson, Agassiz, Bache, and Ben [Professor Peirce]. It was my plan amplified and improved.

February 24th. I told you a word about the Academy in one of my notes, but only a word, being in a hurry. The appointment of a Permanent Commission was suggested to me by one of my letters, which quoted a passage from the British War Office which spoke of a *Select Commission*; and when I mentioned it to Bache and Henry they acquiesced, and the latter presented the plan to the department. You saw, by the copy of the Secretary's letter to me, that our plan was accepted without any change whatever. We had hardly got through this thing before the idea flashed upon my mind that the whole plan, so long entertained, of the Academy could be successfully carried out if an act of incorporation were boldly asked for in the name of some of the leading men of science from different parts of the country. This I submitted to Bache and Henry with details, but the view was not immediately adopted. The next step was Agassiz coming to Washington as one of the regents of the Smithsonian Institution. Then followed a visit to Agassiz by Senator Wilson, who had nominated him to the regency. At this meeting, which took place at Bache's, Ben, Bache, and Dr. Gould were present; and it was there that the mode of proceeding was devised. Mr. Wilson introduced the bill last Saturday.

February 27th. I was just called into the Secretary's room to consult about Stevens's battery, and you will be amused to hear that it is now proposed to carry into execution the plan of the much-abused report of the commission of which I was

<sup>1</sup> Henry Wilson, senator from Massachusetts.



chairman, — a report that was laughed at at the time in the papers and by the department. Thus the whirligig of time brings about his revenges.

I am looking for Agassiz to come here and be introduced to Admiral Foote, and then to go with me to the Capitol to see Mr. Grimes about the Academy bill. I go to the President's once more, and I hope for the last time, this morning.

The dinner at Bache's was particularly pleasant, even for the chief's entertainments, which never fail to be agreeable. Judge Loring, Mr. Hosford, and Mr. Hilgard were there.

I have thought a good deal of what you say in your last note of the vanity which leads us to pursue with so much ardor those honors and advantages which we are to enjoy for so short a time. Poor Woodhull's sudden death; the impression left upon my mind by seeing him placed in the tomb, by thinking of the tale, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, now told; by looking after this existence of his, already become evanescent and shadowy; the meditations of serious hours and of advancing age, all come to enforce your reflection and give it unusual weight. On the other hand, we are not *the less* to exert ourselves in our spheres of duty, but the *more even*, on account of the transient nature of our lives and our possessions. We can always, such hypocrites are we to our own consciences, find some excuses for our own pursuits, while we admit the truth of the general principle or sentiment they violate. In my own case I excuse myself for caring so much for my promotion because promotion brings with it repose. I feel as if I had reached a bed which, "longing, I had been sick for." Besides this, it is the exponent of success, and success implies a certain merit, according to Baxter: "For there is most of the heart where there is most of the will; and there is most of the will where there is most endeavor; and where there is most endeavor there is generally most success; so that endeavor must prove the truth of our desire, and success will generally prove the sincerity of our endeavor."

I suppose the test of my humility would be my willingness to lay down my naval rank, my bureau, and the various boards, commissions, and societies of which I am a member, and to retire into the most profound obscurity of private life. Am I ready?

March 7th. Mr. Schaeffer, a *savan* in one of the departments, came into my office this morning to tell me where the club is to meet to-night; and he flew out against the Academy in good, set terms. If the plan we first pitched upon had been followed, that of creating the Academy with a dozen or twenty members, and allowing them to organize and fill up the whole number by usual system of ballot, then the odium of exclusion would have been divided and distributed. . . . You will perceive at once that, on the plan I proposed, not only would the odium (if any) of exclusion be numerously shared, but a wider and broader opinion and control would have been brought to bear on selection, which would then have become election. And this was due to the interests of the government and to the claims of men of science.

April 12th. What a different meaning life and death have to us now at this terrible period of civil war, and in the ordinary times of peace and quiet! I think more of death because life has now a new value derived from the possibility of being serviceable to the country. Oh my country, my country! how my heart aches and all the pleasure of life is taken away by its distress! It grieves me so, beyond the utmost power of endurance, to hear some of my friends speak of its government and its institutions as failures. . . . It is well enough for our born enemies, like the English, whose business and duty and interest and honor and pleasure it is to hate and vilify us, and to think of us the evil they wish may befall us, — it is well enough for them to indulge in the prospect of our decline, either, as some of the English noblemen have done, with the zealous joy of malice, or as the English student may do, who honors the Queen, and consequently

hates or despises the people of all other nations with the quiet and egotistical satisfaction of a philosopher. But for an American to take delight in prognosticating the ruin of the country, who at this moment when so many men, women, and children are undergoing the pains of death, or pains worse than death, in the service and cause of her preservation, is himself enjoying a perfect exemption from all the horrors of civil war, is an exhibition, at least, of the want of a spirit of good-fellowship and manliness, a want of that gallantry which would lead one who possessed the qualities of a man to speak cheerily and encouragingly and bravely in the greatest of all contests, the contest for the life and existence of our common mother, our country. The man who is deficient in patriotism must be deficient in all the generous virtues, though he may possess those that are the results of prudence and worldly discretion.

May 30th. Foote came to me again this morning, and told me that I might take his rooms on Monday. I knew, of course, from his previous manner and conversation, that he was going away, and that he was going to relieve Du Pont appeared most probable. Several other indications led to the opinion, some time ago, that things were all awry in Du Pont's case ; and I conferred with Bache, Henry, and Bridge<sup>1</sup> in vain, and cudged my brains in vain, to find some ground on which to plant myself in taking up his difference and urging his being kept in command. But when Foote informed me this morning that he was going to New York to-morrow night, I saw that the affair had already reached, if it had not passed, its crisis, and that I must speak at once, or forever after hold my peace.

June 23d. Poor Foote seems to linger along more vitally than was expected. The account given of him by Dr. Whelan has taken away all hopes of his final recovery. At first I was not prepared to give this hope up, he had been so often

<sup>1</sup> Paymaster-General Horatio Bridge.

prostrated by sudden and violent attacks of disease, which were paroxysmal in their nature and appearance.

All his life he has been more or less of a valetudinarian, though always active both in mind and body. He was always devoted to some popular and prevailing remedy of the day. Hydropathy was, at one time, his pursuit almost. At another time his eyes troubled him, and the treatment and care of them absorbed his time and thoughts. The Maine Liquor Law was also a hobby. It was characteristic of his mind that, when his attention was once turned to a thing, he never relaxed his zeal or his efforts till the object was attained. This constancy of purpose, combined with observation, activity, and a sincere desire to be useful, assisted by the judgment and energies proceeding from good natural abilities sufficiently well trained, and, above all, strengthened and enlightened by a devout dependence on God and the best influences of a religious spirit, had carried him through some arduous undertakings in the course of his professional life before he went to the Mississippi. The earnest convictions of his piety manifested themselves in his outward demeanor, and never failed to create an affectionate respect and a real admiration. They gave an heroic stamp to his character by inspiring him with the strong persuasion felt by St. Paul, "I can do all things, God helping me." His career in the service has been a very marked one from the beginning, and would have been long remembered, even without the distinctions of the war. Foote was an affectionate friend, and constant in his friendship as in all other things. The intimacy we formed in the frigate *United States* was never broken or interrupted. However long our separations might be, we resumed our old connection and relation as soon as we came together again. And he was not only a faithful but a wise and judicious friend, — a true friend in the highest and best meaning of the much-abused word; speaking frankly and boldly, without reserve and without disguise, when there was

a necessity for it, and sparing no pains to serve a friend when an opportunity offered. He understood and acknowledged the duties of friendship, and performed them, as he did all other duties, conscientiously. No man surpassed him in zeal and earnest devotion to the great cause in which we are engaged. His life and its best efforts belonged to his country, and all the ends he aimed at were so patriotic, religious, and true that he entirely fulfilled the injunction of Wolsey to Cromwell. His death will be a sad loss to the country at this time, and will be so regarded.

I look back with the deepest interest and feeling to the time when we sat apart from the other midshipmen, in the steerage of the *United States*, and studied for our examinations, without book, teacher, or guide in the most important part of our studies, practical seamanship, and the working of ships. We made a manuscript book of these subjects. I often reflect upon this passage of our lives with pleasure, because it showed intellect, energy, and a well-directed ambition. The examinations were then brand-new. I should regard a similar sight to-day with interest and pleasure. Forty years of friendship! How long a period! And yet the separation comes before the allotted time of life has expired, while there still might be many more years of employment without unduly lengthening the span. God's will be done. Foote is happy in his death. God grant to me, also, in his infinite mercy, an honorable and timely death.

June 26th. I send you to-day an "Intelligencer" containing the Secretary's letter to John Rodgers, on the occasion of his recent engagement, the most remarkable of the war. Nothing not immediately or nearly concerning myself could have given me so much real satisfaction and pleasure. He is the most accomplished and the best-instructed officer in the navy; and no one, in the navy or out of it, officer or citizen, surpasses him, or has ever surpassed him, in courage, loyalty, zeal, promptness, energy, activity, fidelity, and, lastly, in skill.

He has not been well treated by the department ; his services, and the cheerfulness and modesty with which he performed them, have not been appreciated and properly estimated. I thank God that his patience and unselfishness have been rewarded at last. It is curious to see how the whirligig of Time brings about his revenges. It was once, or rather, to borrow a phrase from Mr. Chose, "the cry went once" on Dahlgren and his eleven-inch, and at that time John Rodgers was at a discount. When Rodman's fifteen-inch gun was introduced, Dahlgren pronounced against it, and refused to bear, or rather demanded to be openly acquitted of, any responsibility concerning it. Fox decided against his dictum, and himself, on his own authority and charge, took the matter out of the hands of the Bureau of Ordnance. The recent attack on Fort Sumter was a disappointment to Fox, on account of guns and monitors both. But this fight of Rodgers's, one of the most remarkable in naval history, destined to be a great exemplar and to be constantly cited forever, completely justified Fox's bold determination in behalf of guns and vessels ; and Rodgers, who was the chief actor in the drama, is now the hero and pet, and the former magnus Apollo is cast down from his pedestal.

WEEHAWKEN, PORT ROYAL,

June 25, 1863.

DEAR DAVIS, — You will have heard of my good luck in meeting the *Atlanta*, which her officers and the Southern Confederacy were confident could take not only two monitors, but, if need were, half a dozen of them. She came down in the gray of the morning, and, as the *Isendega* gunboat had been reconnoitring us for two days, I had no idea that the *Atlanta* would try her strength against the *Nahant* and *Weehawken*, for I knew that they were cognizant of two monitors. She came down boldly, and with prudent forethought had provided two vessels to tow Downes and myself to Savannah ; and, as beauty loves to smile on valor, they had

arranged, we hear, for a grand ball to honor our coming. "L'homme propose et Dieu dispose." We were actually surprised at their coming, but soon shifted that emotion onto their shoulders. The fifteen-inch, which was fired first, struck the *Atlanta* obliquely upon the centre of the casemate, and, without penetrating in its own proper person, sent in iron fragments and about two barrellfuls of wooden splinters, wounding a good many people and prostrating about forty or fifty men. They say the whole file of marines fell flat as pancakes from the concussion. Lieutenant Barbot (formerly of our service) fell on the deck and remained some minutes unconscious, simply from the concussion. He said that the stunning sensation was in the pit of the stomach, where, I believe, some of the ancients placed the seat of the soul.

This fifteen-inch shot was fired singly, and I saw it strike; so the effect was, I know, due to this and not to the eleven. Afterwards the guns were fired in pairs, and I cannot separate them. This shot took out all their wish to fight, and the pilot said the bell was rung to go ahead, to run back, when a second shot struck the top of the pilot-house, blocked up the scuttle, and prevented access to it. They ran aground and hoisted the white flag. We fired two shots after the white flag was up, for we had not anticipated such quick results; and from smoke in the air, or from some peculiar reflection from the water upon it, I thought it was a blue flag. So the *Atlanta* was taken with three shots.

Downes was exceedingly mortified that he did not get a shot. He intended to run close alongside and deliver his fire yardarm and yardarm. I, less ambitious and more modest, was willing to take such opening as I could get. Downes now declares he will fire next time at two miles' distance. The Confederate officers said that they had nothing so strong as the *Atlanta*. Webb told me, or some one else, I forget which, that such guns as those of the *Atlanta* had been shot through nine inches of iron, and then ten feet into a solid

bank of earth behind the iron. As we were untouched, we cannot say anything about the power of her guns. . . .

Affectionately yours,

JOHN RODGERS.

June 27th. The news of poor Foote's death is in the papers this morning. It makes me sad, though hourly looked for. His perfect repose, at this time, has in it something to be envied. Some capable person ought to sum up his services and make a sketch of his works and character, while the memory of his death "be still green." How secure he is, now and henceforward, against the evils still threatening us who remain behind! "Nothing can touch him further," while we are yet trembling for the future. I shall always think with great pleasure of that last Saturday evening I passed with him, which was in some measure the renewal of our youthful associations. This was but one month ago, — "a little month, — within a month!"

The Secretary is preparing a general order for the occasion. His early connection with Foote gives a tender and almost romantic interest to this event, so solemn and important on many other accounts. You perceive that my mind runs upon this subject to the exclusion of all others. I should take a melancholy pleasure in attending his funeral.<sup>1</sup>

July 8th. In the midst of this exciting news [Gettysburg], it seems strange that one should think or speak of anything but the country and the happy prospects of returning peace. Much remains, to be sure, to be done; but we may well thank God for this most happy promise. So passionately is my heart devoted to the restoration of the Union, and the preservation of the national integrity, that all else seems insignificant. It is an occasion for heartfelt joy that we are not to be humiliated by any further demonstrations of

<sup>1</sup> The wish was fulfilled. Admiral Davis represented the Navy Department in Foote's funeral at New Haven.



the scorn and malignant hate of the aristocracy of England, which will be civil enough if we are to be ourselves mighty and to be feared. The capture of the *Atlanta*, the defeat of Lee, the fall of Vicksburg, the undoubted surrender of Port Hudson in a few days, and the very serious trouble in North Carolina looking to the separation of that State from the Confederacy and its return to the Union, are most important facts bearing upon the present condition and future state of the nation.

I have never in my life experienced a more solemn sense of thankfulness to God, and of dependence on his infinite goodness, than now. But one week ago we were in a state of doubt and apprehension as to the safety of the great cities, including Washington; and to-day we are thinking of the cessation of the war. There is much yet to be done, especially by General Meade here and by Generals Grant and Rosecrans in the West. The opportunity for suppressing the rebellion is not lost upon the government, which is, I believe, straining every nerve to secure the total rout and dispersion of Lee's army.

July 15th. To-day is Commencement Day, and Cambridge is as cheerful and gay as usual on this day of festivity. I should like to be there, but it is not worth while to wish. To-day there is enough to fill the mind with the New York riots, the escape of Lee's army, and the good news from the West. The last are very promising, and look very much as if the rebel government would have to go back to Montgomery. Richmond is projected so far beyond the States which do now, in reality, constitute the Confederacy, that, with our troops in possession of Tennessee, it would seem impossible for the traitors to stay there. I am sorry for Lee's escape, but not surprised; we had no proof of General Meade's military capacity; and the position of the army, to which its late success at Gettysburg was owing, was taken up before General Meade came upon the ground.

There are two reflections which arise : one is, that it will be much better in the end that the rebels should have employed all their means, opportunities, resources, and time before the war closes, that they may be too well and thoroughly chastised to undertake it again ; the other is, that the question of negro slavery ought to be further advanced towards its ultimate and only settlement — emancipation — before we lay down our own arms, or stop the military organization of the negroes.

August 19th. I passed an hour yesterday morning reading the correspondence between the United States and Great Britain during the summer of 1862, which has brought more home to me than ever the position assumed toward us in this war by the higher classes of Englishmen.

The passionate desire to see our nationality destroyed, and our prosperity ruined, presents a spectacle of human frailty not exceeded by anything related by Gibbon. The envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness from which this desire springs manifest and comprise as great a corruption of the heart as the profligacy and debauchery of the worst period of the decline of the Roman Empire. A member stands up in the British House of Commons and boasts of his infamy. He boasts that he is a pirate, and endeavors to justify himself by a lie, and both the boast and the falsehood contribute to his honor. Such is the state of the English mind toward this country that now hatred of America and of Americans is a transmitted instinct, born with the well-born Englishman, developed in the nursery, and matured in the drawing-room and school-room. What an all but incredible consequence and proof of this hatred is the same Englishman's becoming an enthusiastic friend and advocate of slavery, who for fifty years has made it his chief merit that he has done so much for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade !

But hate is a bad counselor, as they cannot fail, one day, to discover.

During the autumn of 1863 the admiral made a tour of the Great Lakes, with other members of the board, on business connected with the Lighthouse Establishment, in which Mrs. Davis accompanied him, and his letters were interrupted.

October 13th. A curious fact was mentioned at the meeting of the Lighthouse Board, — that the British Admiralty was in the habit of sending their charts, as published, to the Lighthouse Board and Coast Survey, until the autumn of '61, when this practice was stopped, and that it had just been resumed again. This is interesting as showing the conviction of the English people that our nationality was irrevocably lost in the autumn of '61, and that this conviction was in some degree weakened by the events of the past summer.

The English nation has studied to make itself hateful in the eyes of other nations, and has succeeded to a charm. I imagine there is not a people in the world that will not rejoice when it comes their turn to experience the misfortunes that sooner or later visit every country.

December 13th. I put in this envelope some verses I should read aloud to you if you were by, and a description of Mr. Lincoln, quite cleverly done, though evidently written as much for effect as for truth's sake. Don't show them to ———, or to any of the President's dislikers. You may be assured that in future times Lincoln will be regarded as the very greatest of all the blessings bestowed on this country in these sad times, — as God-sent, appointed by God, like the prophets of old, to do his work, to save the nation and regenerate the people, to remove the curse of slavery, and to set another example of the profound wisdom that lies hidden and unrevealed in simplicity, truthfulness, uprightness before God, humility, conscientiousness, even when unaccompanied with great talents or great learning. In his and similar examples consists the political life of the nation and its safety, — the safety of our republican institutions.

April 4, 1864. Poor Preble<sup>1</sup> has committed another mistake, which the Secretary seems only too ready to turn against him to justify his former severity. You may have seen that he met the *Florida* at Funchal, Madeira, and though this was a neutral port, and he was legally justified in not attacking her, he would have been applauded to the echo if he had made the capture, and it would have been a most remarkable piece of good luck for an old-fashioned sloop, and would have secured him a vote of thanks, a step up on the ladder of promotion, and a distinguished reputation.

There might have been some little diplomatic powwow about it, but the rebels are not recognized, and, if they were, are not in a situation to demand redress or exact it. Our government would have apologized, and Preble would have shifted his pennant to the *Florida*. As it is, he has sailed, like Sir Andrew, into the north of the department's opinion, where he will hang like an icicle on a Dutchman's beard, unless he redeems himself by some laudable attempt either of valor or policy. . . . He admits or states, with the most perfect unconsciousness of his error, that his men were so eager to engage the *Florida* that he drew the shot from his guns to prevent their firing into her, confessing that he did not possess the perfect command of his own ship, and obedience and subordination of his men ; and that he disabled his vessel in the presence of the enemy, who might have given him a broadside with impunity, and been out of the reach of his guns before he could have shotted them. This was one of those very rare occasions which that fickle goddess, Fortune, throws in an individual's way in the mere wantonness of prodigality, and to have missed improving it will be to Preble a perpetual regret, which no future success can wholly obliterate. And the worst feature of the case is, that this *Florida* is the same vessel (then the *Oreto*) that caused him so much affliction at Mobile. His blood hath been too cold

<sup>1</sup> Commander George H. Preble, of the sloop of war *Jamestown*.

and temperate,—inapt to stir at these indignities. The piratical character of the *Florida* is now so well established, and so generally admitted, that the probability is that there would not have been even a remonstrance; and if his own government had thought it necessary to find fault with him, in order to show its respect for the law of nations, its censure would have been a mere love-pat. I am grieved to the heart for this mistake. If Preble had been endowed with a little atom of that spirit which led Nelson to tack without orders at St. Vincent, and to refuse to see the admiral's signal at Copenhagen, he would have gone it blind, would have paid up old scores, and rid the ocean of a pirate.

May 7th. Yesterday, while I was in Fox's office talking on business, the President came in, and seeing that he interrupted us he said: "I have nothing to say, I did not come in for any object; I was once at a county town, during the session of the court, where there were a great many lawyers present, and a stranger,—a countryman,—surprised at such a crowd, asked what it meant, and if all these lawyers had business there. 'No,' was the answer; 'they have not come to court because they have any business here, but because they have no business anywhere else.' This," said the President, "is my case. I have nothing to do, and have been over to Stanton's, and have now come here. The fact is, I cannot keep still, I am so anxious to hear something about the army." He then asked Fox for news. We are told this morning that there was fighting all day Wednesday, Thursday, and on Friday morning, since which there has been no reliable information. There are many rumors, but none to be trusted, and our state of mind is the most anxious possible.

May 8th. The day is a remarkably fine one — an anticipation of summer, with the heat tempered by a pleasant wind westerly. Throughout the war the days of the greatest care and anxiety, and of the most important events, have been Sun-

days. To-day is added to the list. We are in the deepest suspense to know the issue of the last three or four days' fighting. There is something in the morning papers, and there are rumors — when is war without its rumors! But there is nothing definite. The impressions and reports are favorable; the government, however, is very reticent. Under the circumstances this silence would be considered unfavorably. There are two facts well known to the public which prevent this apprehension on this occasion. One is, that the President knows just as little as any one about Grant's movements, except as the reports come in; and as these reports are telegraphic the newspaper correspondents *may* know them as well and as soon as the authorities. The other is that the line of communication is wholly and purposely severed. The President said the other day in Fox's room that Grant had got on the wall and kicked away the ladder — like Cortez in Mexico, he has burnt his ships. The want of information, therefore, proceeds from a want of communication, and is shared by the President in common with others. Ammen is an old schoolmate and intimate friend of Grant, and has been very recently, if he is not now, with him by special invitation; and Ammen told me that Grant had said that other generals have sought Lee, but that he should give Lee the trouble of looking after him.

There are certain features of the war which I dwell upon with satisfaction, not as relating to the result of the battle now raging, but as affecting the final issue. One of these features is the manner in which Lee has been met. He has been hitherto fought with the advantages of position, intrenchments, and defense all on his side; and by generals confessedly his inferiors, whence arises the impression that he has a better army and does not make mistakes. And yet never did a general or his advisers commit a greater blunder than Lee in going into Pennsylvania, — so military men said at the time, — and his army was entirely overthrown by ours,

the advantage of position being on our side, while our defensive stand was selected only forty-eight hours before the battle, and was not, like his at Fredericksburg, deliberately prepared against assault by months of labor spent on fortifications. Thus it appears that our army is better than his, or at least as good, and that he can commit the grossest blunders. I say the grossest, for every success in Pennsylvania would have carried him farther from his resources, and more and more into the midst of the thick population of a State that never knew any condition but that of civil liberty, that abhorred him and the slaves black and white whom he led, and would have risen against him *en masse*; and would have compelled him, if he continued to advance, to leave in his rear fortified places. And finally, he would have subjected himself, in his retreat, to the fate of Charles after his unsuccessful invasion of France, and it would have gone hard with us but some one should have arisen who would better the instruction afforded by that lesson in history. And all this while the chief and only real business of Lee was the defense of the capital of the usurped government, and the prudent husbandry of his resources both of material and men, the reduction of which he was beginning to feel sorely.

Another feature of the existing state of the war is the condition of the rebels in respect to their men and material. There is a simple proposition, which is stated in a variety of forms, according to its particular application, and which enters, in one of these forms, into the common proverbs of the language, and that is, "People cannot *have* their cake and *eat* it." The rebel government at Richmond has called out, by the force of conscription, all the men between sixteen and sixty. This is eating their cake, and the cake is gone — there are no more to call out. . . . The third general feature of the war is the sacred constancy of the Northern mind and heart to the Union, and to the cause of liberty, civil and personal. I think that I, and those who like me would rather

die than give up these holy trusts, truly represent the North, and not the traitors, not the indifferent who are willing to carry fardels, nor the mean and tame natures who, for the respect of a long life,

“would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
The oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely.”

The time will come when the croakers, and the timid, and the laggards, of all of whom there are, thank God but a few, will be ashamed of themselves.

There is another general feature of the war which bears upon the present as well as the future. That is the concentration of the forces on both sides. Not only have the rebels exhausted their population by conscription, but they have brought together the greater part of their means from every quarter, and have shown the determination of the desperate gambler to stake their political life upon a cast, and stand the hazard of the die. Accordingly, *they* say that this will be the last summer’s campaign, whichever side is victorious. This is the truth with regard to them, but not to ourselves. Their resources will be utterly exhausted in the event of failure; ours are scarcely less abundant than at the beginning of the war, while our experience enables us to make better use of them. This feature gives special importance to the present campaign. We are concentrating our forces like them, and we are also assailing them in several directions. Hooker and Sigel, it is understood, are ascending the Shenandoah Valley: Butler, after making a feint at West Point, has gone up the James, and landed at City Point with an army which report fixes at sixty thousand men. Burnside has joined Grant with thirty or thirty-five thousand fresh troops. Great issues are preparing, with this difference, however. If they fail they are ruined. If we fail we shall be “delayed, but nothing altered; what we were we are; more straining on for plucking back.”



May 13th. I am much tried in my efforts to preserve my balance while the exciting news is coming in from the army. The news of the morning is most cheering, and you will be glad to know that more troops are constantly going to reinforce Grant. It would seem hardly possible that this kind of fighting should continue much longer. It is said that we have forty thousand men hors de combat, through death, wounds, prisoners, stragglers, and missing, and the rebels as many more. Lee's wounded are said to be neglected. What scenes of suffering and distress the blessed light of day is now witnessing !

May 15th. I feel as you say you do about these brilliant successes of the war — that the decisive battle is still to be fought. Lee's whole force must cease to exist as an organized army before we begin to see the end of the war. Still everything is in the highest degree promising and encouraging. The spirit of the army is magnificent, equal to anything ; their achievements brilliant ; their numbers undiminished, the places of the killed and wounded having been supplied by fresh troops ; and their gains in guns, colors, prisoners, and ground, substantial and cheering. Lee's army, on the contrary, must be dispirited by losses, want of supplies, and still more by failures. In the several greatest of the battles of the last eight days, Lee has been the attacking party, meaning to drive us back, and he has been signally repulsed, and been forced to retire. Everything looks well and hopeful for us. We have already accomplished great things, and we have destroyed the prestige, the *renommée* of Lee and his army. And yet again I feel with you that, until that army is utterly routed, broken up, and scattered never to come together again in its present shape ; until Richmond is taken and lies at our mercy, and until all military organization on the part of the rebels ceases to exist in Virginia, I shall not be satisfied.

There is one special reason for being anxious for the

immediate defeat of Lee's army, — a complete Waterloo defeat of horse, foot, and dragoons, artillery, camp equipage, and supplies, — and that is, the fear of foreign intervention. The news of the successes of our arms up to Saturday (yesterday) morning went to Europe in the steamer of that day. It will suggest the idea that foreign aid must be given to the rebels at once or it will be too late, and it will excite the frantic efforts of their friends; and, again, it will give a very serious aspect to the position assumed by one or two of the European states towards us in this rebellion, — the open aid and sympathy given by England, and her piracy; the sympathy and aid of Napoleon, and his Mexican project. It makes me shudder to think of the future in this light. The extreme folly of the upper classes in England is deeply to be deplored in the name of humanity, speaking humanly. Napoleon's downfall must sooner or later have turned upon some such act of baseness and folly combined, as this Mexican scheme, as his uncle's did on the invasion of Russia. He has staked the fortunes of his house against those of the young republic, and he must stand the hazard of the die. But I find it most painful to dwell upon the possible troubles ahead, except in the light of God's providence. "From seeming evil, still enduing good."

June 8th. I had a note from Bache this morning, written in a trembling hand, but saying nothing of himself.<sup>1</sup> If you are correct in your information, — and it seems to come from the best source, — his sickness is one of the very saddest things in the world, the breaking up of so many ties and associations and connections. To me it is particularly distressing. Besides our old coast survey bond, which has never been wholly severed, we are joint members of the Lighthouse Board, of the Permanent Commission, of the Commission on Boston Harbor, of the Board for Experiments on Steam Expansion, of

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bache's health had failed. He died in February, 1867, after a lingering illness.

that for correcting the changes in Sandy Hook, and probably of the Advisory Council to the New Jersey-Commission, and of others which I do not now recall. Here are six connections which are all of them of a nature to constitute a brotherhood or good-fellowship of labor. In these respects how much I owe to him, and how much I shall miss him from all the accustomed walks of life !

June 17th. Yesterday there came to see me a Captain Richardson (acting volunteer lieutenant), who has been on the Mississippi all the war, beginning with Foote's time and ending with the Red River Expedition. He has just resigned, and is traveling for pleasure. We fought over the battles of Fort Pillow and Memphis again, and I was quite interested by his mode of speaking of them. He thinks that on both occasions the enemy might have had the victory if he had been bold enough to have used his force properly. At Fort Pillow he sunk one of the ironclads and disabled another ; and if one of the most powerful rams had run into the *Benton*, she would have sunk and the day would have been theirs. But the *Benton's* armament terrified them. So at Memphis, they ought to have *made* the attack, not waited for it, and the result would have been in their favor, in consequence of the great power of their rams and the weakness of our vessels. He is, no doubt, correct. But how different would have been my fate if the rebel fleet had been victorious and ours had been destroyed ! The one thing for which I was most thankful was the rebels not perceiving what their proper course was at Fort Pillow. They should have run by instead of engaging me,<sup>1</sup> and gone up to Cairo, St. Louis, and Louisville, and laid those cities under contribution, or, at least, have terrified them immensely. They had entirely the advantage of me in speed. I often put up a silent prayer of

<sup>1</sup> It will be recalled that, in discussing this possibility at the time, the admiral thought that the enemy's fleet would not have been able to pass the batteries at Island No. 10.

thankfulness to God for having delivered us from that danger. Suppose that this had happened the day after Foote left the fleet,—this thought makes me modest, thoroughly so; for, whatever I did do or might have done, I could not have controlled this thought if it sprung up in the mind of the enemy; and it certainly would have caused immense trouble, and would, in all probability, have resulted in great personal injury to me.

During the summer of 1864 the admiral was ill with a return of the Mississippi malarial poisoning, and passed some time at home in Cambridge. He was also absent from Washington during the autumn on business connected with the Lighthouse Board, and as chairman of a commission to select a site for a Western navy yard. In the winter his family moved to Washington, and the home in Cambridge was finally broken up. In April, 1865, he served, in the funeral of the President, on the Guard of Honor, that guard of veteran commanders of the army and navy which kept unceasing watch at the head of the bier in the funeral progress through the heart of the nation.

During Admiral Davis's service in the Navy Department there was one subject in which he was deeply interested, and in which he was indirectly concerned, which has been very lightly touched upon in the foregoing pages; that is, Du Pont's difference with the department, and his relief from the command of the South Atlantic Squadron. Davis was, of course, Du Pont's friend throughout the whole of this difficulty and afterwards. When it came to a question of Du Pont's relief, there could be no doubt that Foote was

the best man for the place ; but Foote died on the eve of sailing from New York, and there can be no question that the choice should then have fallen on Davis. The influences which led to Dahlgren's appointment will not be rehearsed here, as they concerned Davis personally in no way whatever. Davis had offered his services ; he had the full confidence of the department, especially of Mr. Fox, with whom he maintained throughout the war the most intimate relations ; he had been over the whole question of the attack on Charleston with both Mr. Welles and Mr. Fox, and had formed his plans, and he expected to go. He wrote to his wife with this expectation. Neither did he himself, nor any one else at that time, consider the duties of a chief of bureau as paramount in importance to a command afloat. On this subject he wrote to Du Pont a year later : " I should go further than you and say that in no case is the position of an officer at the department, that of chief of bureau included, so important as a command afloat. A navy officer's ' pride of place ' is on the quarter-deck. The business of most bureaus can be performed, with a little special training, as well by a citizen as a navy officer. But it is only the latter, and the best specimen of the latter, who makes a good commander-in-chief afloat."

In reviewing Admiral Davis's services during the civil war, there is one quality upon which it is pardonable to insist, — his total effacement of self in a passionate devotion to the cause of the country in the preservation of the Union. He possessed this trait in common with nearly all the great leaders which the civil war

produced, and he possessed it in a very marked degree. If his letters have not shown this, they have shown nothing; but his actions showed it still more. It is conspicuous in his relations with Du Pont and Foote. Toward the latter, in fact, this devotion took the form of a self-sacrifice so complete that his services have been misunderstood and underestimated to the present day. But there was, on the part of all the great naval officers of the war period, a mutual cordiality, an intimacy, a bond of brotherhood and fellowship in a common cause, — and that the greatest cause in which an officer could possibly be called upon to serve, — which placed them entirely above and beyond petty or personal jealousy. Davis actually planned the battle of Port Royal, which was fought out on his plan; but he gave the whole credit, and justly, to the commander-in-chief, who had the same right to command the brain of his staff as he had to use the brawn and sinew of the seamen who served the guns. Davis's wisdom and calmness in adversity restrained the fiery impetuosity of Farragut, smarting under fancied disgrace, and saved the combined squadrons from certain disaster under the impregnable batteries of Vicksburg. They differed, but "not unkindly." There could be no thought of mistrust between the men, as the following letter attests: —

UNITED STATES FLAGSHIP HARTFORD,  
WEST GULF SQUADRON,

MOBILE BAY, October 1, 1864.

DEAR DAVIS, — Your kind letter inclosing that of my old friend, Dr. Townsend, was duly received, and for which please to accept my grateful thanks. My great desire has

always been to serve my country by hunting the enemy, and, next to that, my great ambition has been to do all in my power to elevate the navy, as far as my limited powers would permit, and my self-love suggested that as the best means of obtaining a high stand among my brother officers. Every man, I think, desires to obtain the goal for which he started, — the head of his profession, that is, the highest rank. The letters which I daily receive, from both the old and young of the navy, all tend to show me that I have to thank God that I have done it without doing injustice to any one. It has been done in the simple discharge of my duty to the best of my abilities, and it has pleased God to grant me success. You, Du Pont, Porter, and some few others have, like myself, been humble instruments to attain the great end, — to crush out the rebellion. God grant that others may appear, for we can say with the good book, "The field is large, but the laborers are few."

Please to present my kind regards to Mrs. Davis. I will take great pleasure in sending your kind letter to Mrs. F. as the best mode of conveying your sentiments.

Very truly your friend,

D. G. FARRAGUT.

P. S. I have to be careful of my head. This blockade duty, with eighty vessels, nearly 1000 miles of coast, etc., etc., has been a terrible pull upon my brain.

Yours,

D. G. F.

If Admiral Davis remained at the Navy Department during the last two years of the war, it was through the force of circumstances over which he had no control, and not through any effort or seeking of his own. He had not sought relief from the command on the Mississippi; on the contrary, he had expected to remain. He "saw his duty," and sought only employ-

ment in which he could be of the greatest service to the country. The arduous service on the river killed Foote, and broke down Davis's health. In fact, both of these officers were too old for such exposure, and Davis died from the results of that service as surely as Foote did, though not so soon. After his return from the Mississippi, there was but one opportunity for active service, and that went to a younger man. But it is highly probable that he remained in Washington because he was an extremely useful man in the department at that particular time. In our system, or rather want of system, of naval administration, the personal character of those in authority is a most telling factor. Good men will make a bad system work somehow, by the force of their own individuality. This has been shown again and again in the administration of the Navy Department, and never so conspicuously as during the four years of the civil war, under the administration of Mr. Fox; and it was probably the intimacy with the latter, and the harmony and earnestness with which the two worked together, which kept Davis in Washington.



## CHAPTER XIV <sup>1</sup>

### THE BRAZIL STATION AND PARAGUAY

AT the close of the war, Admiral Davis relinquished the Bureau of Navigation in order to assume the superintendency of the Naval Observatory, made vacant by the death of Gillis. This office was, by the admiral's own arrangement, subordinate in rank to the one he vacated; but it carried him back to the field of scientific usefulness, where his taste and inclination really lay, and his previous experience at the head of the Almanac qualified him preëminently for the place. He served as superintendent two years. In 1866, and in accordance with a resolution of the Senate, he prepared a general and complete review of all surveys hitherto made on the possible routes for inter-oceanic railways and canals across the American isthmus, which was printed as a public document for the use of the surveying and exploring expeditions then just projected. This volume is still the standard authority for the earlier surveys, and has been used by recent expeditions. In this year he also served as a member of the board of admirals, of which Farragut was the chairman, convened for the purpose of reviewing the indi-

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is rewritten from the article prepared by the author for the *Biographical Memoirs of the National Academy of Sciences*.

vidual services of naval officers during the civil war, and making recommendations for promotion and reward. The labors of this board were an invidious and thankless task, requiring the greatest tact and discrimination, and, as may be inferred, its results led to heart-burnings and jealousies which survived for many years; but the duties were faithfully performed, and, although the results were not always satisfactory to individuals, the integrity of the board itself was never impugned. The board had to deal with delicate questions, involving personal and individual claims, preferences, and comparisons, and on the whole it did its work exceedingly well. The officers composing the board were the highest in rank in the navy, and its decisions were thus placed beyond the reach of cavil or suspicion. But Admiral Davis was still a flag officer in activity; and early in 1867 he was again called upon to hoist his flag, and appointed commander-in-chief of the Brazil station. He sailed from Boston in his flagship, the *Guerrière*, a fine new steam frigate, and relieved Rear Admiral Gordon, in command of the station at Rio de Janeiro, in July, 1867.

One of Admiral Davis's earliest acts on the station was to land in force, and in coöperation with several of the foreign naval powers represented at Montevideo, for the protection of American interests threatened in the revolution which culminated in the assassination of Vernancio Flores. It is not necessary and would be tedious to enter into the intricacies of South American political complications and upheavals, except in so far as they concern the admiral himself, but it must be said

that on the east coast of South America in 1867, the same political disturbances prevailed which have characterized the Spanish-American republics since their independence, and with which Admiral Davis had been made familiar by previous experiences on the west coast. The Argentine Republic had just emerged from a series of struggles, lasting through the Rosas wars, and until the consolidation of the Confederation. Brazil, a stable empire, which had been up to that time singularly free from the internal disturbances which marked the history of her neighbors, was allied with the Argentine Republic and Uruguay against the Republic of Paraguay in a war of conquest and extermination; while Uruguay, or the Banda Oriental as it is called, was torn by contending factions using murder and riot as a means toward political ascendancy. In the midst of these agitations American commerce and enterprise, reviving after the civil war, were seeking a foothold in South America, and American interests had to be protected.

The so-called Republic of Paraguay, which fought single handed against the powerful triple alliance, was ruled by Francisco Solano Lopez, the third in regular succession of the absolute dictators or tyrants who had governed the country since its foundation as an independent state. When Paraguay declared her independence of Spain in 1811, her remoteness from the sea and the occupation of the Spanish forces in the attempt to quell simultaneous insurrections in the more accessible colonies caused her act to be ignored by the mother country. Paraguay became independent without a struggle or the effusion of blood. A congress held at

Asuncion, in 1814, named the famous Dr. Francia dictator for three years, and at the end of this period his nomination was confirmed for life. Very little is known of the actual condition of Paraguay in the reign of Francia, because he pursued a policy of complete seclusion, and excluded all foreigners from the country. Stories were circulated imputing to him the utmost severity and cruelty, and he has generally been viewed as a gloomy and malignant despot, but the case rests on rather slender evidence. Carlyle has celebrated Francia in a famous essay. For years the country remained as isolated as the heart of Thibet, and on the death of Francia in 1840, after a short period of anarchy, the dictatorship was assumed by Carlos Antonio Lopez. He was more liberal to foreigners than Francia had been. A tax was, however, levied on all vessels navigating the Paraguay River. Lopez took the title of president, and established a constitution, by the conditions of which the congress could only be convened by the act of the president, who, in case of death or disability, was to be succeeded by the vice-president whom he had the power of appointing ; so that Lopez had only to name his son vice-president to make the succession secure in his own family. In 1855 the United States steamer *Waterwitch*, while surveying in the Paraguay River, had been fired into from a shore battery and one man killed, so the United States sent a naval expedition, with a commissioner, to demand and enforce reparation. In 1859 the commissioner of the United States concluded a treaty with Paraguay, and from that time forward a United States minister con-

tinued to reside in Asuncion. Francisco Solano Lopez was educated at Paris, and being secure in the succession to the rulership of his country he received a military training, and imbibed rather ambitious ideas in the France of the second empire. He succeeded his father, Carlos Antonio, in 1862, and was even more liberal than the latter, and virtually opened the country to commerce, but maintained a tax on vessels navigating the Paraguay. This tax was a sore point with Brazil. The Paraguay River was the highway to her southwestern provinces, and its free navigation an important question. Moreover Lopez had become aggressive. He had Napoleonic ideas of conquest and military dominion, so that a conflict between the two countries was inevitable. War broke out in 1864 and dragged on for six years, the Paraguayans fighting with great spirit against overwhelming odds, and the allies slowly forcing them back by the mere weight of numbers from one stronghold to another along the river course, and Paraguay remained as hermetically sealed to the outside world by the operations of the war as it had been in Francia's time, for the river is the only approach to the country. Meanwhile the American minister continued to reside at Asuncion, being appointed solely for political reasons, long after every other foreign representative, diplomatic and consular, had withdrawn.

Such was the condition of affairs in the River Plate when Admiral Davis took command on the station. To keep open communication with the American minister in Paraguay was one of the duties which devolved upon him.

The war on the part of the allies degenerated into a personal war against Lopez, who was denounced as a miscreant whom it had become a virtue to destroy. Stories of his barbarity and cruelty were rife in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, but only one side of the case has ever been heard, as Lopez had no friends beyond the confines of his own dominions. The country was a military camp. Every male capable of bearing arms was enrolled, and most of the females were with the army. The towns and villages were deserted, industry, except so far as it related to military supplies, was suspended, the camp was the capital, and the dictator commander-in-chief. This condition was brought about, not by any arbitrary act of Lopez himself, but by the pressure of the invasion. Even had he been the constitutional president of a free republic the situation would have been the same, for the whole people was in arms in defense of its homes against foreign invasion. From this point of view at least the Paraguayan cause was just.

The American minister had written to Washington in the early part of the war in terms of the most fulsome flattery of Lopez, but unfortunately the minister himself was beginning to get into trouble on both sides. He was accused by both parties to the war of using his diplomatic privileges to further his private interests, and whatever the truth of these accusations may be, in this case at least both sides were heard. The allies accused him of carrying on a profitable trade in arms and supplies, which were passed unexamined through the Brazilian blockading squadron as the per-

sonal property of the American minister, and the Paraguayans accused him of selling military information to their enemies, and later he was accused by Lopez of abetting a conspiracy which he discovered, or pretended to discover, against his life, and of harboring the conspirators and refugees from military justice in the legation of the United States. Whatever the actual merits of the case may have been, a simple recital of the circumstances has been given in order to make clear a situation of affairs in which Admiral Davis now became involved, and with which he was called upon to deal in his own way, and for the same reason a somewhat prolix account of the actual condition of the Republic of Paraguay, and the circumstances attending the war of extermination waged by the triple alliance against Lopez, has been presented.

In the summer (the winter of the southern hemisphere) of 1868 the *Wasp* had been sent by the admiral to Asuncion to communicate with the United States minister. The latter sent by her commander a message to the admiral asking for the immediate return of the vessel, as he felt that his situation was precarious, and that he might be obliged to leave at short notice; in short, he wanted a vessel of war to fall back upon. So upon the return of the *Wasp* to Montevideo the admiral dispatched her at once again to Asuncion, and gave her commander orders to place his vessel at the minister's disposal. The *Wasp* was an iron paddle-wheel steamer of English build, which had been captured on the blockade during the civil war and taken into the service. She carried a light battery of brass guns, and

was well adapted for river service. Her captain was Commander (the late Rear Admiral) William A. Kirkland, an officer who was specially qualified for service in the River Plate, where he had passed much of his active career, for he spoke Spanish and the dialects of the river like a native, was thoroughly familiar with the habits and traits of the people, understood the native character, and was a skillful diplomatist as well as a gallant officer. Indeed, so well was the value of these special qualities understood at Washington that he had been kept almost continuously on duty in the River Plate. He knew Lopez better, probably, than any one in South America.

When the *Wasp* reached Asuncion the minister was, or thought he was, living in daily terror of his life. The legation was surrounded by Lopez's police, and no member of it dared stir abroad. No overt act had been committed, but it was undoubtedly the intention of Lopez to arrest any member of the household, except the minister himself, who ventured beyond the precincts of the legation. Captain Kirkland believed that the minister's fears were greatly exaggerated, but there is no doubt that he was thoroughly frightened, and had but one wish, to get on board the *Wasp*, and out of Lopez's reach at the earliest possible moment. Arrangements were therefore made for the immediate embarkation of himself and his household. The party left the legation headed by the minister himself carrying the American flag, but no sooner were they on the street than two of the party, refugees from Lopez's service whom the minister had sheltered, were forcibly arrested.



Even then it is probable that had the minister resisted and protested, the arrest would not have taken place, but instead he made a precipitate retreat on board the *Wasp*. No sooner was he on board than he insisted on sailing at once. It was in vain that Captain Kirkland represented that having undertaken to extend his protection to these men it was shameful to leave without them, and that a demand from himself would procure their instant delivery. A frightened man does not listen to reason, and Captain Kirkland, against his own judgment, but acting in strict conformity with his orders, weighed anchor and proceeded down the river.

When the *Wasp* reached Buenos Aires the admiral was at Rio de Janeiro. There were no telegraphs in those days, but the news of this outrage upon an American diplomatist reached him in due course of post, perhaps three weeks after the event. The admiral never had the slightest doubt as to the course which it was proper to pursue. The business which had brought him to Rio de Janeiro was directly connected with the condition of affairs in Paraguay. The minister to Paraguay had been recalled by orders from Washington, which however he had not received at the date of his leaving the country ; his successor was appointed and was now within a few days' sail of Rio de Janeiro on board of the American mail steamer, and the admiral had been directed to meet him at Rio, offer him a safe conduct to his station, and confer with him as to the situation of affairs in the River Plate. The new minister was a distinguished officer of the civil war, and acted in entire harmony and accord with the admiral

throughout the entire affair. He took passage on board the *Guerrière* for Montevideo, where the admiral had already directed the ships of his squadron to assemble in preparation for a move up the river. As soon as the *Guerrière* reached Montevideo the admiral shifted his flag to the *Wasp*, and with the newly appointed minister on board, and with as many ships of the squadron as could be floated over the bar at Martin Garcia, he proceeded up the river. The vessels engaged in this demonstration were the *Wasp*, 3 guns (flag), the *Pawnee*, 11 guns, the *Kansas*, 8 guns, the *Quinnebaug*, 6 guns, and the *Shamokin*, 10 guns.

It is about a week's navigation from Buenos Aires to Asuncion, for after ships enter the narrow reaches of the Parana and Paraguay they must anchor at night, and the strong current of the river retards progress by day. It was in midsummer (December), 1868, and at that season of the year the climate of the upper river is something infernal. Along the right bank stretches for hundreds of miles the Gran Chaco, a noisome wilderness of jungle and morass, into which no human being can enter and live, and in which only alligators can dwell. A Brazilian army which entered this swamp for a march of about twenty miles to flank Asuncion died like rotten sheep. From this bank great segments of tangled forest growth break away with the force of the stream, and float down with the current in the form of floating islands, some of them of enormous extent, so that at times, to a vessel ascending the stream, the whole course ahead seems to be land. These gather across the ship's hawse at night, and must be cleared

away with great labor in the morning. All day a vertical sun beats down upon the breathless mirror of the river, and in the furnace heat and damp of the swamps swarms of noxious insects breed, and these, with the heat and the foul miasmas of the Chaco, make the nights hideous; and as a variety to these torments a tornado will occasionally sweep across the river from the south, and the temperature will fall forty or fifty degrees in an instant. Necessarily the health of the squadron suffered. Many men were on the sick-list from fever, and also from mosquito bites, and one man on board the *Wasp*, driven mad by these pests, actually committed suicide by drowning.

In the meantime Asuncion had fallen and was occupied by the allies. Lopez's last stronghold on the river was at a point called Angostura, about twenty miles below Asuncion, where he had erected a battery which commanded a bend of the river, and when the *Wasp* arrived the Brazilian ironclads were bombarding this position, coming up into action in the morning and dropping down out of range at night. To those officers who had taken the hard knocks of the civil war at home the Brazilian methods of warfare seemed simply puerile. The admiral had in his squadron guns enough to have knocked this battery down in half an hour if American methods had to be resorted to; but he had left the squadron some miles below the lower Brazilian lines, and came on alone in the *Wasp*, as he did not choose to make a show of his force until it became necessary to use it. The newly appointed minister to Paraguay was also on board the *Wasp*, but it is needless to say

that this fact was not proclaimed, nor was it known by either the Brazilians or Paraguayans until the affair was concluded by the navy. On the morning after the arrival of the *Wasp*, which had anchored just above the battery and out of the line of fire, the Brazilian fleet came up into action, the leading ship carrying the American flag at the fore, a proceeding which called forth a peremptory challenge from Admiral Davis, as while this flag flew the fort did not fire, and the Brazilian ships were enabled to take position under its protection. It is needless to say that this experiment was not repeated.

Immediately upon his arrival in front of Angostura, the admiral had notified the Paraguayan commander that he wished to communicate with the President. Lopez was with the army, some miles in the interior, but a meeting-place was arranged at an intermediate point, to which the admiral sent his fleet captain and Captain Kirkland. The conference, so far as these two were concerned, was limited to a peremptory demand for the immediate surrender of the two persons arrested from under the protection of the American minister. Lopez would not have been a South American potentate if he could have yielded without talk, and the men were actually at a place some distance in the interior; but they were delivered on board the *Wasp* the same night, and a suitable apology was made, which was the utmost reparation that could be extorted in the wretched plight of Paraguay. The newly appointed minister then landed and presented his credentials, the *Wasp* sailed the next morning, and

within a week the whole squadron was in Montevideo again.

The whole of this incident might have been dismissed in a single paragraph, except that it was made a subject of congressional investigation, and led to a personal attack on Admiral Davis instigated by the ex-minister to Paraguay himself who was an unworthy member of a powerful political family. The case was one of the minor scandals of that scandalous political period. The animus of the attack was not far to seek, it being only a noisy trick to divert public notice from the conduct of others besides the naval officers, for Admiral Godon, Admiral Davis's predecessor on the station, was also involved in this attack. The absurdity of the investigation and its methods in Godon's case may be judged from the fact that he was censured for having acted in obedience to the explicit orders of the Navy Department. So in Davis's case also, the investigation proceeded although his conduct received the approval of the Navy Department and the President. In point of fact the whole affair had been conducted by the admiral with spirit and firmness, and the object of the expedition had been immediately accomplished, without a resort to force, which would have involved the country in hostilities against an exhausted and sinking state in the heart of South America, for a contemptible cause. Of course the principal charge against Admiral Davis was that he had employed persuasion where he should have employed force; but that his enemies had to go far afield for causes of offense may be understood by the fact that his being a man of

refinement and cultivation was seriously cited against him in the committee. The committee itself had prejudged the case, and was inimical to the admiral and to the navy as an institution. Admiral Davis's testimony with all the evidence which bore in his favor was suppressed in a printed copy of the report which was widely circulated by his enemies, and the committee even declined to examine witnesses on his side. The findings virtually censured him because he was a gentleman and not a truculent blackguard, but the report was never brought up in the House, and the whole question, having fulfilled the purpose for which it was intended, was allowed to subside.

Admiral Davis's side of this story has never yet been told; but, besides the printed report of the congressional committee, a so-called history of Paraguay was published by the ex-minister, which was written for no other ostensible purpose than to perpetuate the slander. The two refugees, whom Admiral Davis had rescued from what they conceived to be deadly peril, joined the hue and cry against him, and allied themselves with their former master, toward whom they certainly had little cause to entertain a sentiment of gratitude. They were both men of more than doubtful character, — one an American adventurer, and the other a British subject. They had both been in Lopez's service, and were accused by him of conspiring against his life. They took refuge in the American legation, and the minister conferred upon them some sort of nominal appointment as attachés, which, considering their situation as refugees, was at least an injudicious thing to

do. Admiral Davis had never credited the stories of Lopez's barbarity. He had the most reliable information of the actual condition of Paraguay during the war from Captain Kirkland's repeated voyages up the river in the *Wasp*, and he had better evidence to judge by than any man in South America. Moreover, he was a man of clear mind and sound judgment, and did not form his opinions from gossip. Notwithstanding many dismal predictions that the men would be murdered before they could be rescued, Admiral Davis was quite confident that he would find them in good health; and the event proved that he was right. They pretended that they had been tortured, by a process which they described to the committee, and which must have left indelible physical traces; but their persons, when they were received on board the *Wasp*, bore not the slightest evidence of violence. They were not even emaciated, though there was a decided scarcity of provisions in Paraguay, and some of the native soldiers were mere skeletons. Before the committee finished its work Paraguay was overrun by the allies, Lopez himself was killed in the last precipitate retreat of the remnants of his army, and the country was a Brazilian province.

A recital of the unsavory details of this investigation has not been an agreeable task; but the attack caused Admiral Davis some mortification at the end of an honorable career of forty-five years in the navy; and the story of his life would not be complete without an exposure of facts which have never before been made public. It is safe to say that his reputation suffered nothing, either in or out of the navy, from this perse-

cution. As one of his contemporaries wrote: "The affair was, in truth, a conspicuous instance of the soundness and reasonableness of judgment, the conscientious patriotism, and the high sense of professional responsibility, which always distinguished him."



## CHAPTER XV

### CONCLUSION

THE cruise in South America, the story of which has just been related, was the last event of Admiral Davis's career as a naval officer at sea. He returned to the United States in June, 1869; and he had now reached the age when, under the ordinary operation of the law, he would have retired, but the vote of thanks extended his period on the active list for ten years. He passed the summer of 1869, on an extended leave of absence, with his family in the woods of Maine; and it is worthy of notice that this was the first period of actual rest and recreation which he had ever enjoyed in his whole professional life, or at least since he was a very young man. From the time when he and Foote sat apart in the steerage of the *United States*, working for the examination and writing their book on seamanship, to the day when he laid down his pen only a few hours before his death, he was almost never idle. His career offers a contrast in this respect to the common experience of naval officers of his day; for in his early life, unless an officer found employment for himself, there were generally long periods of forced inactivity. His employments changed, from time to time, from the active life at sea to study and the pur-

suits of science ; but there was really nothing inconsistent in the seeming contrasts of his career. In this respect, at least, he was a striking contrast to others of his contemporaries in the navy who devoted their lives exclusively to science.

During his absence in Brazil, the University of Harvard had conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Laws, a rare honor to a naval officer, and in the autumn of 1869 he again became a member of the Lighthouse Board and resided in Washington.

In 1870 Admiral Davis was appointed to command the naval station at Norfolk, and spent three years at this post. They were uneventful years, and to himself and his family a period of social isolation. Southern society had not yet recovered from the shock of the war ; and although there were several of the admiral's former friends and old brother officers still resident in Norfolk, they did not come forward, and in fact the war was too recent an event, and the wounds which it left too fresh, to make a residence in a Southern city agreeable to a Northern man. The official duties of his station, his books, family, and domestic interests, and occasional visits to New England in the summer months, filled the time until 1874, when he was again appointed Superintendent of the Naval Observatory, and returned to that duty in time to take part as Chairman of the Transit of Venus Commission in the preparations for the observations of that year.

At this time a second and revised edition of his work on "Inter-Oceanic Railways and Canals" was published, and he was frequently consulted on matters relating to

harbor improvements. The journals and memoranda of the voyage of the Arctic discovery-ship *Polaris*, together with Captain Hall's journals of his other expeditions to the polar seas, had been purchased by the government, and, in accordance with a resolution of the Senate, were intrusted to Admiral Davis to edit.<sup>1</sup> He threw into this work the best energy of the last years of his life, and as a preparation for it he made an exhaustive study of the whole subject of polar exploration from the times of Frobisher and Barentz. His interest in this work became absorbing. Assisted by Professor Joseph Nourse, who published the second volume of the "Narrative"<sup>2</sup> after the admiral's death, he labored industriously on this book throughout the summer of 1876. This occupation, and his duties as Superintendent of the Observatory, as Chairman of the Transit of Venus Commission, and in connection with the Observatory and naval exhibit at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, kept him closely confined, and his usual summer vacation was curtailed. The summer was an exceedingly hot and unhealthy one, and in the autumn, after serving on a board with Admirals Porter and Rowan to establish the site of a naval station at Port Royal, he was again seized with an attack of his old Mississippi complaint, — malarial poisoning. His general health declined rapidly during the winter, but he

<sup>1</sup> *Narrative of the North Polar Expedition U. S. Ship Polaris, Captain Charles Francis Hall.* By Rear Admiral C. H. Davis, U. S. N. Washington : Government Printing Office. 1876.

<sup>2</sup> *Narrative of the Second Arctic Expedition made by Charles F. Hall,* etc. By Professor J. E. Nourse, U. S. N. Washington : Government Printing Office. 1879.

worked faithfully on the proofs of the *Polaris* narrative, and on the general correspondence of his office, until the day before his death, which occurred at the Naval Observatory in Washington on February 18, 1877.

He was buried at Cambridge, within sight of the towers of the University; and a stained-glass window in the Memorial Hall looks out upon the scenes in which he walked familiarly, and commemorates the fact that he was the oldest representative of the University, and the senior in rank, who served during the civil war.<sup>1</sup>

The extracts from his letters, written during the civil war, which have appeared in the foregoing pages, have been sufficient to throw a strong light on Admiral Davis's personal character and motives, brought out as they were by the stirring events and emotions of the times in which they were written. To these evidences of his character may be added some quotations from his contemporaries and associates:—

Notwithstanding the active and prominent life which Admiral Davis led, and his energy and dash as a naval commander, his tastes, especially in his later years, were much more those

<sup>1</sup> The inscription on this window, which was written by his friend, Professor G. M. Lane, is:—

IN · MEMORIAM · CAROLI · HENRICI · DAVIS · PRÆF · NAV ·  
 BELLI · ET · PACIS · ARTIBUS · PRÆSTANTIS · PER · LV · ANNOS ·  
 SINGULAREM · FIDEM · PRUDENTIAM · VIRTUTEM · AD · REIPUBLICÆ ·  
 UTILITATEM · ET · SALUTEM · CONTULIT : HAEC · OB · REM · BENE ·  
 NAVIBUS · GESTAM · AMPLICIMIS · VERBIS · GRATIAS · EGIT · SE-  
 NATUS · POPULUSQUE · AMERICANUS : NATUS · EST · A · D · XVII ·  
 K · FEB · A · MDCCCVII · MORTUUS · A · D · XII · KAL · MART · A ·  
 MDCCCLXXVII · ALUMNUS · A · MDCCCXXV · LL · D · A · MDCCCLXVIII :  
 PORT ROYAL · MEMPHIS · FORT PILLOW.

of a refined gentleman of literary leisure than of the active man of the world. He was little inclined to mingle in general society, but rather sought that of the cultivated few whose tastes were congenial with his own. His relations with the men of science who were his official subordinates were singularly free from those complaints, jealousies, and distrusts which so often arise when military men are placed in charge of works of a purely scientific character. This arose from an entire absence of every trace of jealousy in his nature, combined with an admiration for intellectual superiority in others, which led him to concede everything to it. He combined independence of character with Christian courtesy, in a way that made him a model to the young men by whom he was surrounded. No human being who came into his presence was too lowly to be addressed with the most kindly courtesy; and, when arrogance or impertinence became insufferable, no respect for position or influence gloved the hand that dealt the blow.

His conversation was forcible, full of good sense, and most amusing. He brought to bear on any subject he took up a host of argument, illustration, and elucidation; and he liked to brighten up the driest discussion of professional and scientific matters with his original and vivid turns of expression, or with some apt and unhackneyed quotation. He was an admirable officer. He had the true spirit of command,—strong, dignified, and quiet; and one that, not needing artificial support, was accompanied by a thoroughly friendly relation to his officers and men. . . . He was a charming companion, abounding to the last in a natural freshness and gayety of spirit. . . . He was a man of marked courage, and had eminently the courage of his convictions. At the same time, he was distinguished by perfect courtesy, having but one standard of manners, and that a finished and unaffected one, for all classes of men. He bore good will to every one, and was always in a cordial vein. Meanness, trickery, and malice,

indeed, roused his bitter contempt. But a salient characteristic of at least his later years was his profound trust in human nature, his complete freedom from cynicism, and his faith in the power of right and truth to conquer both the world and individual conscience.

In his official character, Admiral Davis was, first and foremost, a naval officer. He belonged to that class which it is the honor of the regular services of the army and navy to produce, and whose reward is generally only the fulfillment of a high ideal all its own; which it is often the privilege of vulgar malice to flout and condemn, but which is truly the safeguard and bulwark of the republic. He was incidentally a student, but he was neither a pedant nor a dreamer. He could borrow from the past elucidation and example, but he brought the labors of the study to aid, not to impede, the demands of stirring action in the present. He lived intensely and earnestly in the times in which his life was cast.

Since the close of his active career, the service which he loved has passed through a long and almost hopeless period of decadence and neglect, until it has, by a sudden transition, again attained to a position of respectable importance. A sharp line of demarcation has been drawn in men's minds between its former state and its present, — between, in the cant phrase of the day, the old navy and the new. The service has forgotten its past, or at the best remembers it only as a subject for curiosity, bearing a very trifling relation to the present. Tradition and the trace of continuity are lost. Nor is this unnatural. It is due in some measure, perhaps, to a shallow and illiberal scheme at Annapolis, but mainly

to the vigor and energy with which the whole navy has arisen, from the enforced lethargy of years, to adapt itself to new conditions and the engrossing pursuits which they demand. But if successive phases of studied neglect and contempt and spasmodic popularity have left the service untainted, it is because the men who compose it to-day, whether they will it so and realize it or not, are, in standard and ideal, the logical heirs and successors of a preceding generation.

It would be false to the teachings of his life to close a review of Admiral Davis's career in any other spirit than that of hopeful expectation and encouragement. Unless the signs of the times are wholly illusory the navy, released from a degrading struggle, against bigotry and caprice, for a mere continued existence, will find its acknowledged place as a factor in the march of the nation as a world-power, even towards a realization of the dream of universal peace. In the even and progressive current of usefulness, succeeding not only because it is skillful with its tools, but because a heritage of earnestness, self-sacrifice, and devotion is its own, it may learn to recognize its own past, and the lives of the men who made it, not as "a series of pictures which please us more or less according to the attitudes of the principal figures and the beauty of the coloring, but as the records of living, acting men, governed by exactly the same passions and motives as ourselves, and therefore always affording us, if we choose to analyze their conduct, the surest and safest rules for our own government; for the interval which divides us from any period of history is really nothing in this respect."





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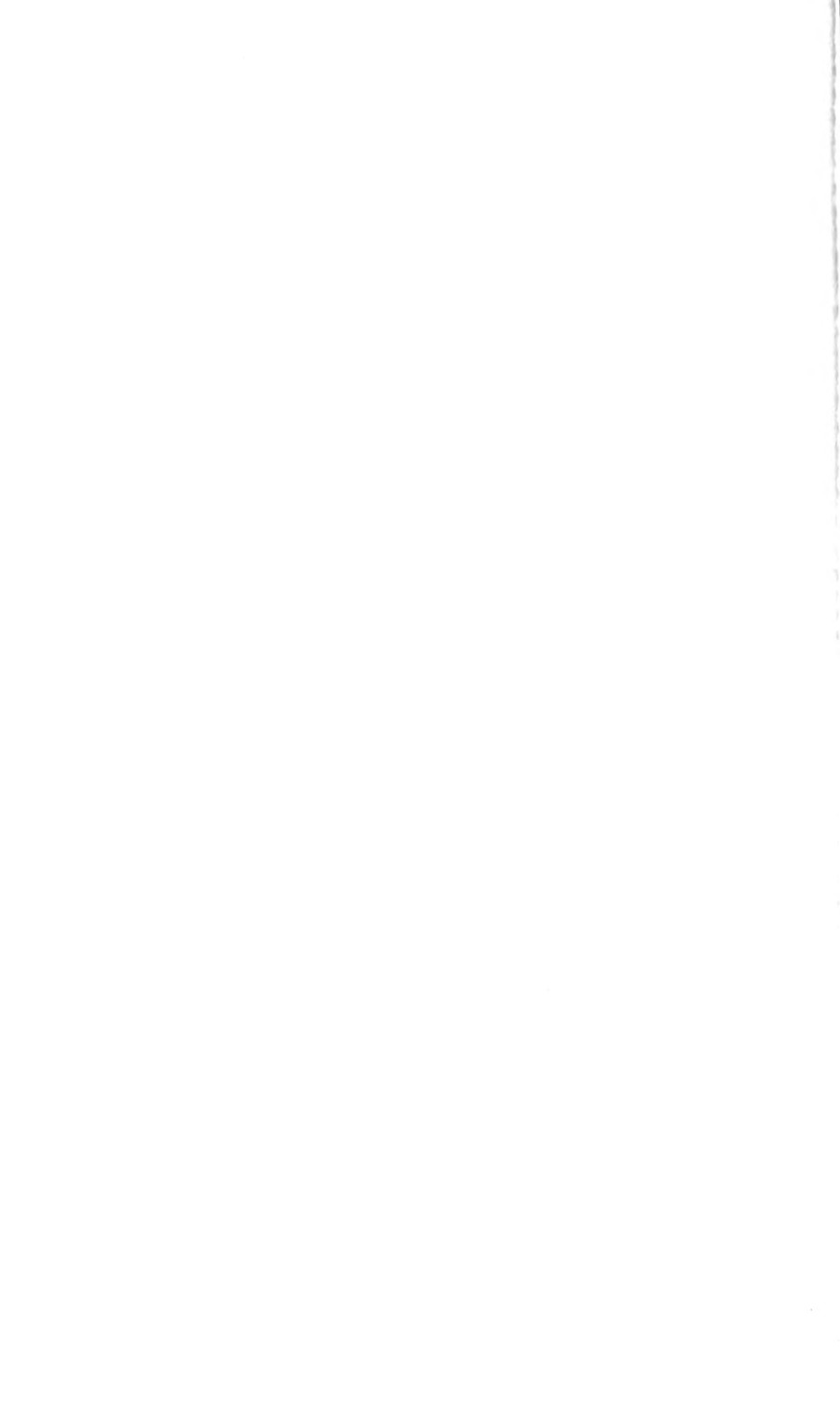
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